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PRIVY COUNCIL INTEREST IN PLAGUE

CONTROL IN LONDON FROM

1625 TO 1637

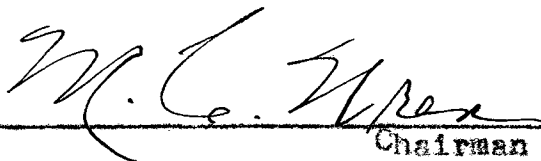
by

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Montana State University
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A. M. H.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The epidemics of bubonic plague which swept over England periodically through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were matters of national as well as local concern, although not until recently have historians given them much attention. The outbreak of the plague of 1625 coincided almost exactly with the accession of Charles I. During its height it completely stopped all trade and disrupted government in the city of London. Great confusion and poverty were left in its wake. It was the greatest plague known to Londoners to that date.

No other town in England approached the size of London, the most densely populated spot in the nation. Less than one square mile enclosed by a wall made up the city proper. A large residential population lived within this area, and all merchandising and commerce were carried on there. The city was built of wood and nearly every street had buildings which "encroached" into the street itself; thus, as more buildings were erected in London the streets tended to become little more than narrow, dark alley ways which wandered indiscriminately throughout the city.

London had its own water supply piped into the city by conduits and made available to the citizens through public fountains. The sewage disposal problem was met by using the convenient rivers and ditches of the city. There was a great ditch around the city wall which was the catch-all for debris gathered by the scavenger, the parish official charged with keeping the streets "sweet and clean."

The one square mile of London proper was divided into twenty-six wards which in turn were divided into ninety-seven parishes. The parish church was both the religious and political meeting house of the smaller unit. The eligible voters of each parish gathered there to elect one man as their representative to the Court of Common Council, which was sort of a lower house of the city legislature.

Each of the wards elected an alderman who held office for life without pay. The twenty-six aldermen who were thus elected formed the Court of Aldermen which conducted most of the city's official business. This court, made up of the richest and most influential Londoners, met nearly every day of the year, sometimes holding both morning and afternoon meetings. One of their number served for one year as lord mayor. The election of the lord mayor called for a great holiday

in the city, with all shops closed and a big parade.

Upon the "householders" of London, whether owners or tenants, fell the costs and burdens of local government. The householder paid all "rates" or taxes and was responsible for lighting the street before his house and keeping the street paved and clean. He served without compensation in the "watch and ward," whose duty was to keep the peace. During an epidemic of plague when nearly all "respectable" people, that is to say most of the "rate-payers," fled to the country, the city was almost devoid of responsible citizens, and the rogues and vagrants were left to roam the streets unmolested.

The scavengers and rakers were those in charge of keeping the streets clean and free from debris. The scavenger, a rate-payer, was in charge of the work which was usually done by the raker. Bearers and searchers of the dead were appointed to check into every death and report its cause. The searchers were "ancient matrons" of the parish who were suspected by contemporary writers to be dishonest and deceitful in their task of reporting the cause of death. Many times they simply did not know the cause of death, and discrepancies in the bills of mortality resulted from their ignorance. Many cases of

"invisible plague" can be charged to the inability of the searchers to make accurate reports. It was also known that the searchers were not above taking bribes and reporting plague deaths as due to other causes. The cry of "Bring Out Your Dead" heralded the approach of the bearers who were employed to carry the bodies of plague victims to burial. All bodies were to be interred at night to discourage curious throngs from following the corpses to the death pits. Certain women were also employed as nurses to care for the plague victims. They were reported to be as dishonest as the searchers and were often accused of thievery. The accusations against these minor officials come mostly from contemporary men of literature. In the Great Plague of 1665 even more evidence of corruption in these offices was recorded. Most of the tales of horror concerning the plague have been written in connection with this, the last great epidemic of plague in England.

The corporation of the city of London did not include within its jurisdiction either the residence of the king, the offices of his ministers, the national courts of justice, or the Houses of Parliament. All these buildings were located outside the walled section of London. This gave the corporation an extraordinary degree of independent power. No other European capital had the power to shut

its gates and keep the king and his officers outside. Such a situation gave rise to much bargaining between the king and the city, and gave London an advantage not enjoyed by other national capitals. Its proximity to national governmental offices kept London in close touch with national affairs and with the privy council, the chief national administrative agency.¹

The population of seventeenth century London has been roughly estimated from the "bills of mortality," which are the records of burials and christenings. By working with these figures, the population of London in 1625 has been estimated at 320,000. This includes the city proper and the surrounding area of the "liberties" and the out-parishes.

The bills of mortality were either written or printed abstracts from the Parish Registers, showing the number of deaths in any certain parish or place. They were issued weekly, monthly and yearly. The later bills also contained the number of christenings for the designated area. The christenings were the number of baptisms performed by the Church of England and not the actual numbers of births

¹ Webb, S. and B., English Local Government, (London, 1906) v. III, pp. 569-692; Sharpe, R. R., London and the Kingdom, (London, 1894-5) v. II, pp. 17-20, 92-6; Wilson, F. P., The Plague in Shakespeare's London, (Oxford, 1927) pp. 209-15; Proclamation by the Mayor, December 12, 1641, State Papers, Domestic Charles I, v. CCCCLXXIII, no. 54, from a photostatic copy of the proclamation.

²
for the area.

The London bills of mortality probably owe their origin to the epidemics of plague which periodically attacked the city. The first bill was published in 1562 and recorded the plague deaths for that year, but it was not until 1594 that the bills were available to the public.³ One writer is of the opinion that the sole purpose of publication was to frighten people away from London.⁴ Queen Elizabeth had had a great dread of the steady growth of the city and continuous proclamations were issued during her reign and those of James I and Charles I to stop the further growth of London.

When the plague deaths were very low or nonexistent the bills ceased to be issued, but as soon as another epidemic appeared the bills again appeared. It was not until the plague of 1603 at the accession of James I that the bills were continued without interruption.

In 1625 a "Great Bill" was issued covering all deaths from December 16, 1624, to December 15, 1625. Deaths in each parish of London proper, in the "liberties," in suburbs in Middlesex and Surrey, and in the pest house, were

² Wilson, Plague in Shakespeare's London, pp. 213-14.

³ Stow, J., The Survey of London, (London, 1633 ed. by J. Strype) Bk. V, p. 448.

⁴ Walford, Cornelius, "Early Bills of Mortality," Royal Historical Society Transactions, Series I, vol. VII (London, 1878), p. 217.

separately recorded in this bill. The same year the Company of Parish Clerks obtained a decree from the Court of Star Chamber to keep a printing press in its hall and to print the weekly and general bills for the city and liberties. The bills were made up in this manner:

When any one dieth in a Parish, either the tolling or ringing of the Bell, or the bespeaking of a Grave, intimateth it to the Searchers, who also keep a Correspondence with the Sexton; and thereupon the ancient Matrons sworn to that Office, repair to the Place where the dead Corps lieth; and upon their own View and other Examination, make a Judgment by what Disease or Casualty the Person died; Which Judgment they report to the Parish-Clerk; as he doth every Tuesday Night, the Account of every Christning or Burial that Week, to the Clerk of the Hall. Whence on Wednesday the general Account is made up and printed, and on Thursday published and brought to the respective Families in every Parish that pay four Shillings a Year for them, which is the Parish-Clerks Benefit.⁵

The first section of this study deals with the plague of 1625 and reviews its effects upon Londoners. Succeeding sections are concerned to examine the relations between the city government of London and the king's privy council in dealing with problems presented by the plagues in 1625, 1630, and 1636.

England retained the Julian calendar, which in the seventeenth century was ten days behind the Gregorian,

⁵

Stow, Survey of London, Bk. V, p. 448.

until 1752. All dates used in this thesis are of the old style unless marked new style (n.s.). The residents from the Catholic countries who were in England in the seventeenth century used the new style dates in all their dispatches, but all English events are calendared in the old style. I have, however, consistently used January 1 as the beginning of the new year, both in the footnotes and in the body of the thesis.

I have, of course, retained the spelling found in published sources. But in materials taken from manuscript, the spelling and punctuation have been modernized.

Chapter II

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF THE CAUSES AND TREATMENT OF THE PLAGUE

Bubonic plague was endemic in England from the time of the Black Death in 1349 until the latter part of the seventeenth century. Nearly every year there were reports of plague deaths, but the number only occasionally reached epidemic proportions.¹

In the seventeenth century men found strange reasons for the periodic outbreaks of the disease. Many were convinced that God visited his wrath upon sinful humanity by sending the plague to scourge mankind, and a recurrence of the sickness was called a "visitation." Some men suggested natural rather than supernatural causes of the disease, and guessed at eclipses, position of the stars, or pollution of the air as possibilities.² Comets seen in 1612, 1618 and 1622 were thought to be harbingers of dreadful events.³

¹ Bell, W. G., The Great Plague in London in 1665 (London, 1924), pp. 1-15; Creighton, C., A History of Epidemics in Britain (Cambridge, 1891), pp. 508-12.

² Lodge, Thomas, A Treatise of the Plague (London, 1603), cited in Wither, George, The History of the Pestilence (1625) (ed. by J. M. French) (Cambridge, Mass., 1932) (hereafter cited as French), p. xxii; Dekker, Thomas, The Plague Pamphlets (ed. by F. P. Wilson) (Oxford, 1925), p. 180.

³ D'Ewes, Sir Simonds, Autobiography, I (London, 1845), pp. 122-23.

Thomas Dekker in 1630 called to mind how the heavens had given forewarning of the plague of 1625: "Agen looke backe upon that Moone, and that officious Starre, waiting so close upon her, and reade in both their faces, what followed after".⁴ But sinful Londoners did not heed the threat, Dekker complained, and their sins were punished by the worst visitation the city had ever suffered. "The Gospell (and Gods Herald's, Preachers) have a long time cryed out against our iniquities, but we are deafe, sleepy and sluggish; and now there is a thunder speakes from Heaven to wake us."⁵

An interesting review of the various factors credited at the time with spreading the plague was drawn up by William Foghurst in 1666:

I will only sett downe a catalogue of these many little peccadilloes which hitherto by most people and Physitians in the world have beene reckoned for absolute causes of the plague, which the most of them at least can bee but only furthering occasions, not originall causes, and they are such as these, viz., thickness of inhabitants; those living as many families in a house; living in cellars; want of fitting accomodations, as good fires, good dyett, washing, want of good conveyances of filth; standing and stinking waters; dunghills, excrements, dead bodies lying unburied and putrifying, churchyards too full crammed, unseasonable weather, south and west winds, much dry weather coming together, over watching the body, overcharging the body with nourishments, hott and moyst constitutions, overheating

⁴ Dekker, Plague Pamphlets, p. 179.

⁵ Ibid. pp. 142-43.

the body with too much venery, increase of vermin, as Frogs, Toades, Spiders, Mice, Flies, wormes, buggs, serpents, locusts, ants, butterflyes, etc. Furring and stopping up of conveyances, as Channells, Pypes, gutters, want of securing ditches and pooles, vaults, Fens, and Marshes; hempe, flax, asphaltum, and sweet herbes, steeped long in standing waters, expiring out of putrified lakes and nasty Dennes and Dungeons, venomous herbes, putrifying above the ground, fumes of metallis and minerals. Arsenick, quicksilver, orpiment or antimony (but I am much mistaken if these emit of themselves any fumes at all); feeding on rotten meate, mouldy bread; malevolent aspects and mixture of the planets, Eclipses of the Luminaries, corruption of the humors, transportation of infected goods from place to place, breaking up tombes and graves, wherein dead bodyes have beene long buried and crowded together (yet this is not very likely to bee true, for when the Charnell houses at St. Paul's was demolished there was a thousand cartloads of dead men's bones carried away to Finsbury, yet noe plague followed it).⁶

Modern medical science has discovered that bubonic plague is spread by rat fleas. The symptoms of the plague are a burning fever, excessive thirst, nausea, extreme pain, and a swelling or buboe found in the arm-pit or groin. These glandular swellings appeared in every plague epidemic, although occasionally they developed late in the epidemic, the earlier victims often dying before the buboe had a chance to develop.⁷

6

Boghurst, William, Loimographia: Or an Experimental Relation of the Plague, of what happened Remarkable in the last Plague in the City of London, 1666, ed. by Dr. J. F. Payne for the Epidemiological Society of London, 1884, cited by French, p. xxiv.

7

Osler, Sir William, Principles and Practices of Medicine, 10th ed. (New York, 1925), pp. 142-43; Liston, W. G. "The Milroy Lectures on the plague", British Medical Journal, June 7, 1924, pp. 997-1001.

In the seventeenth century the buboes were known as God's tokens or plague tokens. They were said to form in distinct varieties depending upon the predominant "Humour" present in the victim. A physician of the time warned his consultants that: "The Spots (otherwise called Gods Tokens) are commonly of the bignesse of a flea-bitten spot; sometimes much bigger. Their colour is according to the praedominancie of the humour in the body; namely Red, or reddish if Choler; Pale-blew or Darke-blew if Flegme; and Leaden or Blackish if Malancholy abound. But they have ever a circle about them. The Red ones a purplish-circle, and the others a redish circle. They appeare most commonly on the breast and backe,"⁸

Probably the most terrifying characteristic of the sickness was the suddenness of its action. Many died after two or three days' illness, some even before any definite symptoms appeared. "Sir Francis Howard's lady took the infection from a new gown she had from London, so as she died the same day she took it".⁹ It was also reported "that my Lord Russell being to go to parliament, had his shoemaker to pull on his boots, who fell down dead of the plague in his presence; whereupon he abstains from that honourable

⁸ Bradwell, Stephen, A physick for the Sicknesses, (London, 1636), quoted by F. P. Wilson (ed. of Dekker's Plague Pamphlets), p. 224.

⁹ Clifford to Conway, September 10, 1625, Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, (hereafter cited as Cal. S. P. Dom.) 1625-1626, p. 102.

assembly, and hath sent the Lords word of this accident".¹⁰
 People feared also to open letters or even to take money
 without carefully washing or fumigating it.¹¹

Treatment of plague in the seventeenth century was designed to counteract both natural and supernatural causes. To please a wrathful God Englishmen fasted and prayed for forgiveness of their sins. A general fast was ordered by the King and Parliament to be kept throughout all England.¹² The Tuscan Resident in London reported to his government on the manner of keeping the fast:

This is a ceremony which is performed in all the parishes, and consists in staying in church all day, singing psalms, hearing sermons, the one shortly after the other, and making I know not how many prayers, imploring God for the stoppage of the

¹⁰

Mead to Stuteville, July 2, 1625, The Court and Times of Charles the First (W. de Gray Birch, ed.) London, 1848), I, p. 39; Creighton, History of Epidemics, p. 512.

¹¹

Dekker, Plague Pamphlets, pp. 59, 157, Mead to Stuteville, July 9, 1625, Court and Times, I, p. 40. "It grows very dangerous on both sides to continue an intercourse of letters, not knowing what hands they pass through, before they come to those to whom they are sent." (Court and Times, p. 40)

¹²

Neddu to Mead, June 24, 1625, Court and Times, I, p. 34. "The House of Commons, joining this day with the Lords, have obtained from his majesty that a general fast shall be kept throughout England." Journal of the House of Commons, (hereafter cited as Commons Journal) June 21, 1625, I, p. 799; Debates in the House of Commons in 1625, (hereafter cited as Commons Debates) (Samuel Gardiner, ed.) (Camden Society, London, 1873) p. 6; Rushworth, Historical Collections, p. 177.

plague and of the ceaseless rain which for a month past has fallen to the detriment of all kinds of crops, and finally that he may be graciously pleased to bless the people, to prosper their undertakings, to give them the victory over all their enemies, and above all to preserve the purity of their religion.¹³

Physicians prescribed herbs for poultices and for use as fumigents. Pimpernel, bay, sage, lavender, myrrh, and frankincense were but a few of the herbs and incense used. Amulets and pomanders were worn as preventives, and people were advised to wear light clothing, take mild exercise, use moderation in all activities, and to "keep the spirit in repose". In a presage of modern attention to diet, seventeenth century physicians recommended fruits and green vegetables, and warned against overindulgence in meats, especially salt meat.¹⁴

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the steps taken by Londoners to protect themselves from the plague, the epidemic of 1625 was worse than any ever before experienced by people of the city. A survivor insisted that "to this present Plague of Pestilence, all former Plagues were but pettie ones ... this, to future Ages and Historiographers must needs be Kalendred the 'Great Plague'."¹⁵

¹³ Salvetti's Dispatch, July 11, 1625 (n.s.) Skrine MSS., Historical Manuscripts Commission (hereafter cited as H.M.C.), Eleventh Report, Appendix, Part I (London, 1887), p. 26.

¹⁴ Lodge, Treatise of the Plague, cited in Wilson, Plague in Shakespeare's London, pp. 7-8; French, p. xxvii. Thomas Lodge was one of the leading physicians of the early seventeenth century. He died in 1625, supposedly of the plague. Wilson op. cit. pp. 156-57.

¹⁵ Lachrymae Londinenses (1626), quoted in Wilson, Plague in Shakespeare's London, p. 175.

Chapter III

THE PLAGUE OF 1625

When Charles I succeeded to the English throne in March, 1625, the immense enthusiasm with which he was greeted was dampened slightly by a threatened outbreak of plague in London. As the tolling of the city's church bells grew more ominous men remembered that his father's reign had opened in the worst attack of plague in living memory. A foreign diplomat in London reported that "it is now observed that the commencement of this reign is marked by a similar calamity, that it increases in like manner from week to week, that it began in the same house and street,¹ and also that it was brought the same way from Holland".

The years since 1603 had produced growing political, economic, and religious tensions between the king and the puritan middle class, and this group which had opposed the late king with little success hoped to find the new king more amenable to its will than his father had been. But as the cold, proud, retiring Charles showed no disposition to remove from court the advisers who had guided his father, men in this superstitious age saw in the plague, which greeted this reign as it had the preceeding one, a sign that no more could be expected from Charles than had been won

¹ Salvetti's Dispatch, July 11, 1625 (n.s.) Skrine MSS. (H.M.C.), p. 27.

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from James.

Although the plague of 1625 in London lasted through most of that year and continued into 1626, its most violent stage came during the late spring and summer months. The number of deaths attributed to the plague were under one hundred a week until the middle of June when a rapid increase was noted. By the middle of July the deaths ran well over one thousand a week, and by August they had reached a peak of over four thousand a week.³ An exaggerated contemporary report listed nine thousand plague deaths in London during the last week in July, 1625.⁴

² Montague, F. C., The History of England from the Accession of James I to the Restoration, (London, 1911) (The Political History of England in 12 vols., ed. by W. Hunt and R. L. Poole) VII, pp. 126-46; Gardiner, S. R., History of England, (London, 1883), V, pp. 217-23; Davies, G., The Early Stuarts, (Oxford, 1937) pp. 33-4.

³ French, p. xxviii; Bell, J., London's Remembrancer (London, 1865), cited by Creighton, pp. 508-9. See also reproduction of the yearly Bill of Mortality for 1625 in Wilson, Plague in Shakespeare's London, p. 174.

⁴ Yonge, Walter, Diary, (George Roberts, ed.) (Camden Society, London, 1848), p. 86.

The wealthier classes who were able to leave London did so in great haste, taking with them as much as possible of their worldly possessions. Many Londoners had country estates of their own and fled there for safety. "The citizens fled away as out of a house on fire, and stuffed their pockets with their best ware, and threw themselves into the highways, and were not received so much as into barns, and perished so, some of them, with more money about them than would have bought the village where they died. A Justice of Peace told me of one that so died with £1,400 about him."⁵

The people of the countryside objected strenuously to the influx of Londoners in their midst. They were extremely ruthless in their treatment of Londoners and would not allow any refugees to enter their towns. A contemporary noted that "they stand (within thirty and forty miles from London) at their Townes ends, forbidding any Horse, carrying a London load on his back, to passe that way, but to goe about, on paine of having his braynes beaten out: and, if they spy but a foot-man ... they cry, 'Arme!', charge their pike-Staves, before he come neere them the length of a furlong; and, stopping their noses, make signes that he must be gone, there is no roome for him..."⁶

⁵ Donne to Roe, November 26, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 158.

⁶ Lekker, Plague Pamphlets, pp. 153-55.

Others were still more heartless.

A man sick of an ague [in this case, the plague] lying on the ground at Maidenhead in Berkshire, with his fit violently on him, had stones cast at him by two men of the towne (whom I could name), and when they could not cause him to rise, one of them tooke a hitcher, or long boat-hook, and hitched in the sick man's breeches, drawing him backward with his face grovelling on the ground, drawing him so under the bridge in a dry place, where he lay till his fit was gone.⁷

As plague increased steadily Charles became alarmed for his own safety. The king was so apprehensive that he issued royal proclamations forbidding anyone from an infected parish to be allowed at court.⁸ The government courts of law were dissolved and adjourned because of the sickness and the Exchequer and its records were moved to Richmond which was comparatively free of plague.⁹ A proclamation had ended the court term,¹⁰ but a number of the

⁷ Taylor, John, The Fearfull Summer, or London's Calamitie, (Oxford, 1625) cited by Creighton, History of Epidemics, p. 519.

⁸ Foedera, conventiones, literae, et culuscunque generis acta publica, inter reges Angliae et alios quovis imperatores, reges, pontifices, principes, vel communitates ab ... anno 1101, ad nostra usque tempora, habita aut tractate; ex authographis ... fideliter exscripta ... (Ed. by T. Rymer and R. Sanderson) (London, 1704-32), (hereafter cited as Rymer, Foedera) June 18, 26, 1625, v. XVIII, pp. 118, 121; Conway to Coventry, May 13, 1625; Proclamations May 17, June 26, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, pp. 22, 24, 49.

⁹ Rushworth, J., Historical Collections (London, 1659) I, p. 178; Rymer, Foedera, XVIII, p. 160.

¹⁰ Rymer, Foedera, XVIII, p. 116; Proclamation, June 18, 1625; Chamberlain to Carleton, June 25, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, pp. 46, 48.

nobility stayed in London for the expected arrival of the Queen.¹¹ It was suspected that the true number of plague deaths was concealed in order to keep the nobility in the city as long as possible.¹² The king and his entourage did leave London early in the summer, however, and the consequent desertion of London by many of the public officials brought about many difficulties in the lives of the remaining citizens.¹³

By early summer the spread of plague was so great that Charles was asked to consider opening the first session of Parliament before his coronation.¹⁴ Parliament opened on June 18 and because of the contagion, the king journeyed to Westminster by water for the opening ceremonies.¹⁵ One of

¹¹ Salvetti's Dispatch, June 13, 1625 (n.s.) Skrine MSS, (H.M.C.), p. 20.

¹² Salvetti's Dispatch, June 20, 1625, (n.s.) Skrine MSS, (H.M.C.), p. 21; Mead to Stuteville, July 2, 1625, Court and Times, I, p. 39.

¹³ Salvetti's Dispatch, August 19, 1625 (n.s.) Skrine MSS, (H.M.C.), p. 28; Pesaro to the Doge, May 2, 1625 (n.s.), Calendar of State papers, Venetian Series 1625-1626, p. 30.

¹⁴ Williams to Conway, June 9, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 40.

¹⁵ Locke to Carleton, June 22, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 48; Pesaro to the Doge, July 4, 1625 (n.s.), Cal. S. P. Ven. 1625-1626, p. 96.

the first considerations of the House of Commons concerned the holding of a public fast: "1. For a Blessing from God upon the King. 2. For the Miseries of the Christian Churches beyond the Seas. 3. For a Blessing upon our Navy. 4. In respect of the grievous Visitation now upon us, by the Plague."¹⁶ Parliament continued in session in Westminster for several weeks, with much debate on the advisability of moving to a less contagious spot.¹⁷ On July 4 the king sent a message to the House of Commons stating that "the sickness is strongly increasinge; when hee should receive word that wee were readye, yet not pressinge us to any hast but such as wee should thincke fit, hee would not deferr to make an end of this session by his presence, or otherwise".¹⁸ On July 11 both houses adjourned¹⁹ to meet again August 1 at Oxford.

When Parliament reconvened at Oxford not all members

¹⁶ Journal of the House of Commons, (hereafter cited as Commons Journal) June 21, 1625, v. I, p. 799; Debates in the House of Commons in 1625, (hereafter cited as Commons Debates) (Samuel Gardiner, ed.) (Camden Society, London, 1873) p. 6.

¹⁷ Commons Journal, June 21, 1625, v. I, p. 800.

¹⁸ Commons Debates, July 4, 1625, p. 41.

¹⁹ Rushworth, Historical Collections, p. 180;
Commons Journal July 11, 1625, I, p. 809;
Commons Debates, July 11, 1625, p. 68;
Lords Journal, July 11, 1625, III, p.
Sir John Davys to Henry, Earl of Huntingdon, July 21, 1625, HMC, MSS. of Reginald Rawdon Hastings, Esq. (London, 1930) II pp. 67-8.

were present because of the plague. Parliament was the only assembly held in Oxford because the infection had already sprung up in the town before their arrival.²⁰

It was reported that "divers houses already are shutt up of the plague and the chiefe inne; the appearance of the Lords there is very smale, under twentie, besydes Byshopps, whoe almost equalled that number. The Commons House is allsoe very emptie".²¹ Soon after the opening of the new

session, Parliament passed a measure for the relief of the poor, whose plight was made worse by the increase of the plague.²² "And whatsoever they did, it was needful to do

it quickly, considering how greatly the Plague increased, and the Bell tolling every minute while they were speaking."²³ Before the session was a fortnight old, the sickness at

Oxford made a longer sitting dangerous, and on August 12 the king dissolved Parliament.²⁴

²⁰ Journal by Lord Mountague of Proceedings in the House of Lords, August 1-12, 1625, MSS of the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensbury, HMC, p. 248.

²¹ Westmorland to Manners, August 7, 1625, MSS. of Duke of Rutland, v. 1, H.M.C. 12th Rep. App. Pt. 4, p. 474.

²² Lords Journal, August 6, 1625, III, p. 475.

²³ Rushworth, Historical Collections, p. 177.

²⁴ Commons, Debates, p. 127; Nethersole to Carleton, August 14, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 84; Rushworth, Historical Collections, p. 195.

All who could afford to do so left the city, and many houses in London were shut up and left to the mercy of those who could not escape. Many city officials fled to the country, and the poor and vagabonds who were left in London roamed the streets, plundering houses and shops and cheating and robbing the plague victims. "Every one does what he pleases, and the houses of merchants who have left London are broken into and robbed."²⁵ The lord mayor sent a precept to the aldermen noting that many citizens had left the city providing no maintenance of the watch, so that "the watches of the city are not duly kept and are not of that number and strength to repress any insolence or disorder that may arise". No constable or scavenger was to leave the city without providing an approved substitute. Anyone who left and did not provide the necessary substitute was to invite "such condign punishment as the quality of his offence shall require". This precept was read aloud²⁶ to the aldermen so they could not deny knowledge of it.

During the height of the plague business was at a complete standstill, and the closed shops did nothing to alleviate the suffering of those who were unfortunate enough to have to stay in London. A gentleman who passed through the streets of London at one o'clock in the

²⁵ Salvetti's Dispatch, August 19, 1625 (n.s.) Skryne MSS. (HMSAC.), p. 28.

²⁶ Lord Mayor's precept to the Aldermen, July 18, 1625, Journal of the Court of Common Council (hereafter cited as Journal) 33, fol. 130.

afternoon remarked that the streets were as deserted as if it were three o'clock in the morning, "no more people stirring, no more shops open. The want and misery is the greatest here that ever any man living knew; no trading at all; the rich all gone; housekeepers and apprentices of manual trades begging in the streets, and that in such a lamentable manner as will make the strongest heart to
 27
 yearn."

In many Streetes, there are none to guard your goods, but the Houses themselves. If one Shop be open, sixteene in a row stand shut up together, and those that are open, were as good to be shut; for they take no Money.

None thrive but Apothecaries, Butchers, Cookes, and Coffin-makers. Coach-men ride a cock-horse, and are so full of Jadish trickes, that you cannot be jolted six miles from London, under thirty or forty shillings. Never was Hackney-flesh so deere. Few woollen Drapers sel any Cloth, but every Churchyard is every day full of linnen Drapers; and the Earth is the great Warehouse, which is piled up with winding-sheetes. To see a Rapier or Feather worne in London now, is as strange, as to meet a Low-countray Souldier with Money in his Purse: The walkes in Pauls are empty; the walkes in London too wide, (here's no justling;) but the best is, Cheape-side is a comfortable Garden, where all Phisicke-Herbes grow.²⁸

The contemporary poet, George Wither, complained of the false dealings that typified human relations, and bitterly assailed those who made a profit from the suffering which many could not escape.

27

Mead to Stuteville, September 10, 1625, Court and Times, I, p. 48

28

Dekker, Plague pamphlets, pp. 138-39.

False wares, false oathes, false measure, and
 false weights
 False promises, and falsified lights,
 Were punisht with false hope, false joyes, false fears,
 False servants, and false friends, to them, and theirs.
 They who of late their neighbours did contemne,
 Had not a neighbour left to comfort them,
 When neighbourhood was needfull. Such as were
 Selfe-lovers, by themselves remained here;
 And wanted those contentments, which arise,
 From Christian Love, and mutuall Amities.
 Most Trades were tradefaln, & few Merchants thriv'd.
 Save those men, who by Death and Picknesses, liv'd.
 The Sextons, Searchers, they that Corpses carie,
 The Herb-wife, Druggist, and Apothecarie,
 Physitians, Surgeons, Nurses, Coffin-makers,
 Bold Mountebanckes, and shamelesse undertakers,
 To cure the Pest in all; these, rich become;
 And what we pray to be delivered from
 Was their advantage. Yea, the worst of these
 Grew stout, and fat, and proud by this disease.
 Some, vented refuse wares, at three times more,
 Than what is best, was prized at before.
 Some set upon their labours such high rates,
 As passed Reason; so, they whose estates
 Did faile of reaching to a price so high,
 Were faine to perish without remedy.
 Some, wolvisly, did prey upon the quick,
 Some, theevishly, purloyned from the sick.
 Some robb'd the dead of sheets, some, of a grave,
 That there another guest may lodging have.²⁹

During the height of the plague the officials were still having trouble keeping the plague victims under quarantine and off the streets. During the time a household was in quarantine, approximately thirty days from the time of the infection in 1625, watchers armed with halberds maintained a twenty-four hour a day guard and locked the house whenever they had to go away on any errand for those in quarantine. Food and water were brought into

the victims who were not supposed to be allowed to go
³⁰
 into the streets. There were, however, complaints that
 the well and the sick were mingling together in the streets
 and could not be kept separated. A contemporary reported
 "it is not certaine whoe is cleein or foulle at London,
³¹
 and thaye have gevin over the closing upp of howses".
 If the infected houses were not shut up they remained open
 in violation of orders of the privy council. To segregate
 plague victims and so to check the spread of the sickness,
 the council ordered the erection of tents and cabins in the
³²
 fields to be used as pest houses.

The London poor were unable to flee to the country
 when an epidemic of plague struck. St. Giles's, Cripplegate;
 St. Olave's, Southwark; St. Sepulchre's, without Newgate;
 and St. Mary's, Whitechapel were the parishes most affected
 by plague. These parishes were the ones with the "mazes of
 lanes and twisting passages, 'pestered' with the tenements
³³
 of the poorer class". Overcrowding, and the attendant
 increase of filth, was sure to spread the sickness. As the

³⁰ Wilson, Plague in Shakespeare's London, pp. 55-60;
 Bell, The Great Plague in London, pp. 51, 106-12.

³¹ Thomas Earl of Kelly to John Earl of Mar, July 18,
 1625, Mar and Kellie MSS. (H. M. C.), p. 230.

³² Order in Council, August 28, 1625, Acts of the Privy
 Council, 1625-1626, pp. 143-44.

³³ Creighton, History of Epidemics, p. 510.

red crosses appeared more and more frequently on the doors of London houses, an order went out from the Court of Aldermen forbidding people to increase the number of occupants in their houses or to divide houses for additional occupancy by other families.³⁴ However, earlier efforts during the reigns of Elizabeth and James to stop the growth of population within the lord mayor's jurisdiction had met with little success,³⁵ and they were of little avail now, even though all those who disobeyed the proclamations against the erection of new buildings were to be imprisoned.³⁶

The privy council frequently helped with poor relief. Since the poor rate of the wards and parishes was insufficient during times of pestilence, the council issued orders for a special collection of funds to be taken up for the poor.³⁷ The heavily populated parishes were not able to bear the increased burden placed on them by the plague. A precept of the lord mayor to the parson and churchwardens of each parish ordered that every Wednesday

³⁴ Order of the Court of Aldermen, Repertories of the Court of Aldermen (hereafter cited as Repertories), XXXIX, fols. 171b, 163, 187.

³⁵ Remembrancia, Index, pp. 42-47; Brett-James, N. G., The Growth of Stuart London (London, 1935), p. 105.

³⁶ Proclamation, May 2, 1625, Rymer, Foedera, XVIII, p. 33; Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 17.

³⁷ Leonard, E. M., Early History of English Poor Relief, (Cambridge, 1900), p. 201.

be observed as a fast and day of prayer, and that the money so saved should be solicited in a house-to-house campaign. The collection was to be made from the "better sort" of inhabitants.³⁸ Those areas which were less heavily stricken with plague were required to contribute to the relief of the poor in the badly infected areas.³⁹ In August a general collection was ordered to be made throughout the kingdom for the relief of the poor and distressed in London and Westminster.⁴⁰ The livery companies in the city were asked to forego their feasts, "especially in these times of God's visitation with the contagious sickness of the plague," and to use the money so saved for the relief of the stricken poor.⁴¹

Government was at a standstill when the rich fled to the country, and the collection of the poor rate was almost

³⁸ Precept to the Parsons and Churchwardens, July, 1625, Journal, XXXIII, fol. 129b.

³⁹ Leonard, English Poor Relief, p. 200. See the Order of the Court of Aldermen, February 14, 1626, requiring the churchwardens of the parishes of St. Helen's Bishopsgate and St. Olave's Hart Street to collect and pay over to the parish of St. Botolph's without Bishopsgate for its stricken poor money which should have been collected while the plague was raging. Repertories, XL, fol. 111b.

⁴⁰ August 11, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1628, p. 83.

⁴¹ Order of the Court of Aldermen, July 5, 1625, Repertories, XXXIX, fol. 268b; Precepts to the Masters and Wardens of the Companies, July 7, 1625, Journal, XXXIII, fols. 128b, 129.

impossible. The House of Lords ordered the poor rate to be doubled in London,⁴² presuming that the city officials would confiscate property in order to collect the levy.

Not only the poor of the city were in dire need during plague times, but other members of society found it necessary to petition for help. The masters of private schools in London asked for assistance in 1625 because their schools were shut down and no money was coming in, and they were unable to pay their rent.⁴³

The condition of small tradesmen was miserable, and poverty grew among them. The Court of Aldermen levied £1,000 to be distributed for their relief,⁴⁴ and the lord mayor protested the council order prohibiting the entrance of food sellers into the city. The violence that might go hand in hand with a food shortage was more to be feared than was the plague itself.⁴⁵ A royal proclamation did prohibit the holding of the Stourbridge fair and the Bartholomew fair in London, however,⁴⁶ and rural producers

⁴² Lords' Journal, August 6, 1625, III, p. 475.

⁴³ Petition of private schoolmasters within the city to the Council, September (2), 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 114.

⁴⁴ Paul to Conway, October 24; Lord Mayor to the Council, November 22, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, pp. 132, 155.

⁴⁵ Lord Mayor to the Council, August 1, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 79; Remembrancia, Index, p. 339, where the date is given as "circa 1625."

⁴⁶ Proclamation, August 4, 1625, Rymer, Foedera, XVIII, p. 170; Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 80; Journal, XXXIII, fol. 131b.

suffered heavily because of the loss of their chief market.⁴⁷

London did what it could, according to the knowledge of the time, to combat the spread of plague. The pesthouses for the sick were established, and the city appointed three doctors to care for the sick. One was to reside at the pesthouse and try to cure those who were committed there. He was to be paid £30 a year for his services.⁴⁸ A city official called the "common hunt" was ordered to kill all dogs "saving greyhounds, and such as shall be led in lines, and gentlewomen's little dogs." Dogs were believed to spread the plague, and so were to be destroyed and buried in the fields outside the city.⁴⁹ One hundred and ninety dogs were said to have been slaughtered in less than a month in the parish of St. Martin's in the Fields in 1625.⁵⁰

Many people who faced the impending threat of death turned from the churches and prayer to riotous living in

⁴⁷ Deputy Lieutenants of Essex to the Council, September 18, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 107.

⁴⁸ Minutes of the Court of Aldermen, July 14, 1625, Repertories, XXXIX, fol. 279b.

⁴⁹ Order of the Court of Aldermen, May 24, 1625, Repertories, XXXIX, fol. 222.

⁵⁰ Walcott, M. E. C., The Memorials of Westminster (London, 1851), pp. 154-55, and The History of the Parish Church of St. Margaret in Westminster (London, 1847), p. 62, cited in Wilson, Plague in Shakespeare's London, p. 40.

what may have been their last days on earth. Dekker was much distressed by this reckless behavior.

If you look into the Fields, looke into the Streetes, looke into Tavernes, looke into Ale-houses; they are all merry, all jocund; no Plague frights them, no Prayers stirre up them, no Fast tyes them to obedience. In the Fields they are (in the time of that divine celebration) walking, talking, laughing, toying, and sporting together. In the Streets, blaspheming, selling, buying, swearing. In Tavernes, and Ale-houses, drinking, roaring, and surfetting: In these, and many other places, Gods Holy-Day is their Worke-days: the Kings Fasting-Day, their day of Riot. 51

The high death rate in London brought on the problem of burying the dead. Huge plague pits were dug to hold the bodies of plague victims, because the cemeteries were filled. As many as forty or fifty bodies were buried in a single pit. The bodies were committed at night, by official order, and dumped from the death carts by the flare of torchlight without church rites.⁵² Dekker warned his readers:

And now, O you Citizens of LONDON, abroad or at home, be you rich, bee you poore, tremble at the repetition of these horrors which here I set downe: and of which ten thousand are eare-witnesses, great numbers of you that are in the City, having likewise beheld some of these, or their like, with your eyes. Neither are these warnings to you of London onely, but to you (who-ever you bee) dwelling in the farthest parts of the Kingdome.

Shall I tell you how many thousands have beene borne on mens shoulders within the compasse of five or six weekes? Bills sent up and downe both Towne and Countrie, have given you already too fearefull informations.

⁵¹ Dekker, Plague Pamphlets, pp. 150-51.

⁵² Bell, The Great Plague in London, p. 49.

Shall I tell you, the Bells call out night and day for more Burials, and have them, yet are not satisfied? ...

Shall I tell you, that Church-yards have letten their ground to so many poore Tenants, that there is scarce roome left for any more to dwell there, they are so pestered? The Statute against Inmates cannot sue these, for having taken once possession, no Law can remove them.

Or shall I tell you, that in many Church-yards (for want of roome) they are compelled to dig Graves like little Cellers, piling up forty or fifty in a Pit? And that in one place of buriall, the Mattocke and Shovell have ventured so farre, that the very Common-shore breakes into these ghastly and gloomy Ware-houses, washing the bodies all over with foule water, because when they lay downe to rest, no one eye was so tender to wet the ground with a teare? 53

After a summer that was horribly disastrous to London the plague finally began to lessen in early September,⁵⁴ but it was over a month later before people began to return to the city. In mid-October a man passing through London's streets reported "the streets full of people, and the highways of passengers--horse and foot".⁵⁵ But the lord mayor found it necessary to repeat the order to shut up the infected houses and to have them marked with the red crosses and "Lord Have Mercy On Us".⁵⁶ Many people feared

53

Dekker, plague Pamphlets, p. 158.

54

Mead to Stuteville, September 4, 1625, Court and Times, v. I, p. 48; Pesaro to the Dogs, October 7, 1625, n.s. Cal. S. p. Ven. 1625-1626, p. 178; Coke to Brooke, October 18, 1625, MSS. of Earl Cowper, I, (H. M. C., 12th Rep. App. Pt. I) p. 218.

55

Mead to Stuteville, October 15, 1625, Court and Times, v. I, p. 54.

56

Lord Mayor's precepts to the Aldermen, October 15, 30, 1625, Journal 33, fols. 140, 144.

an increase in plague because of the return of people to
⁵⁷the city. London was still regarded as a dangerous
 place to those who returned from the fresh air of the
⁵⁸country. Many of the artisans who returned early might
 have saved their lives by being more patient in their
⁵⁹return.

The king and the court did not yet return to London,
 but in December the common players were allowed to come
 to Hampton Court to provide the court with entertainment
⁶⁰for the Christmas holidays. Finally the king and his
 entourage, and also the courts of law, returned to London
⁶¹in January, 1626. The limitation on Londoners'
 attendance at fairs was removed, and again fairs were
⁶²allowed in the city. One of the last proclamations
 issued concerning the epidemic was one that signified its
 close. A general and public thanksgiving was proclaimed

⁵⁷
 Mead to Stuteville, October 15, 1625, Court and Times,
 I, p. 54.

⁵⁸
 Salvetti's Dispatch, October 14, 1625 (n.s.) Skirine
MSS., (H.M.C.), p. 34.

⁵⁹
 Salvetti's Dispatch, November 20, 1625 (n.s.), ibid.,
 p. 36.

⁶⁰
 Rudyerd to Wethersole, December 18, 1625, Cal. S. P.
Dom. 1625-1626, p. 179.

⁶¹
 Salvetti's Dispatch, January 6, 1626, (n.s.) Skirine
MSS. p. 41.

⁶²
 Rymer, Foedera, XVIII, p. 255; Proclamation, June 18,
 1625, Journal 33, fol. 161.

63

in London on January 27, 1626.

The final death totals for the plague year were 35,417 plague deaths in London and the outparishes, with 26,350 deaths for London alone. The death total for London, the outparishes, and the parishes of Westminster, Lambeth, Newington, Stepney, Hackney, and Islington was 41,313. The bills of mortality for 1625 provide the following list of weekly plague deaths.

| <u>Week Ending</u> | <u>Buried</u> | <u>Of Plague</u> | <u>Parishes Infected</u> |
|--------------------|---------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Dec. 23, 1624 | 183 | 0 | 0 |
| 30 | 211 | 0 | 0 |
| Jan. 6, 1625 | 220 | 1 | 1 |
| 13 | 196 | 1 | 1 |
| 20 | 240 | 0 | 0 |
| 27 | 226 | 0 | 0 |
| Feb. 3 | 174 | 3 | 1 |
| 10 | 204 | 5 | 2 |
| 17 | 211 | 3 | 1 |
| 24 | 252 | 1 | 1 |
| Mar. 3 | 207 | 0 | 0 |
| 10 | 210 | 0 | 0 |
| 17 | 262 | 4 | 3 |
| 24 | 226 | 8 | 2 |
| 31 | 243 | 11 | 4 |
| Apr. 7 | 239 | 10 | 4 |
| 14 | 256 | 24 | 10 |
| 21 | 230 | 25 | 11 |
| 28 | 305 | 26 | 9 |
| May 5 | 292 | 30 | 10 |
| 12 | 332 | 45 | 13 |
| 19 | 379 | 71 | 17 |
| 26 | 401 | 78 | 16 |
| June 2 | 395 | 69 | 20 |
| 9 | 434 | 91 | 25 |
| 16 | 510 | 165 | 31 |
| 23 | 640 | 239 | 32 |
| 30 | 942 | 390 | 50 |

63

Proclamation, January 22, 1626 (proclaimed in London, January 27, 1626), Journal XXXIII, fol. 168b; Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 231; Rymer, Foedera, XVIII, p. 276.

| <u>Week Ending</u> | <u>Buried</u> | <u>Of Plague</u> | <u>Parishes Infected</u> |
|--------------------|---------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| July 7 | 1222 | 593 | 57 |
| 14 | 1741 | 1004 | 82 |
| 21 | 2850 | 1819 | 96 |
| 28 | 3583 | 2471 | 103 |
| Aug. 4 | 4517 | 3659 | 114 |
| 11 | 4855 | 4115 | 112 |
| 18 | 5205 | 4463 | 114 |
| 25 | 4841 | 4218 | 114 |
| Sept. 1 | 3897 | 3344 | 117 |
| 8 | 3157 | 2550 | 116 |
| 15 | 2148 | 1674 | 107 |
| 22 | 1994 | 1551 | 111 |
| 29 | 1236 | 852 | 103 |
| Oct. 6 | 828 | 538 | 99 |
| 13 | 815 | 511 | 91 |
| 20 | 651 | 321 | 76 |
| 27 | 375 | 134 | 47 |
| Nov. 3 | 357 | 89 | 41 |
| 10 | 319 | 92 | 35 |
| 17 | 274 | 48 | 22 |
| 24 | 231 | 27 | 16 |
| Dec. 1 | 190 | 15 | 12 |
| 8 | 181 | 15 | 7 |
| 15 | 168 | 6 | 5 |

64

The quoted bill of mortality is for the city of London and the outparishes. The deaths from all causes in May and June were so many more than the reported plague deaths that there must have been some concealment or error in the report. Contemporaries who watched the bills were inclined to feel that the plague deaths were not correctly reported.⁶⁵ One writer asked: "Are there some other diseases as bad and spreading as the plague, or is there untrue dealing in the account?"⁶⁶ There may have been

64

Bell, London's Remembrancer, cited in Creighton, History of Epidemics, p. 508-9; French, p. xxviii.

65

Salvetti's Dispatch, June 13, 20, 1625 (n.s.), Skrine MSS. (H.M.C.), pp. 20, 21.

66

Head to Stuteville, July 2, 1625, Court and Times, I, p. 39.

both error and concealment in the bills, for the death total of 54,265 as compared to the plague total⁶⁷ of 35,417 indicates a definite discrepancy.

⁶⁷

Creighton, History of Epidemics, p. 510.

Chapter IV
THE PRIVY COUNCIL AND THE
PLAGUE OF 1625

The plague of 1625 began to increase early in the year, and as the infection mounted the privy council took steps to check its spread. In March, two days before the death of King James, the lord mayor of London received a letter from the privy council.

Wee understand the plague is dailie increasing in the Cittie, and that there died this last weeke seven of it in one parish, and allthoughe it hath beene increasing divers weekes wee cannot hear that any good course hath beene taken for preventing it by carrying infected persons to the pesthouse, or setting watch upon them, or burning the stuffe of the deceased.¹

Two days after King Charles's accession, the lord mayor received a stricter charge to put into effect the precautions against the spread of plague:

Whereas some of us lately did write unto your Lordshipp etc, concerning the care to be had of the spreading of the infection, we are now by His Majestie's speciall commaund to pray and require your Lordshipp etc. to take all the strictest and severest courses, that are accustomed for repressing of the same, as well by removing the infected to the pest house, as by setting watches upon them not to stirre abroad and by burning the stuffe of such as dye of the infection; and by all other good wayes and meanes that may be used for prevention of inconvenience in this case, as namely, by taking care that the houses infected bee timely discovered and that the billes or

1

Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London, March 25, 1625, Acts of the Privy Council of England 1623-1625, (London,), pp. 505-6; W. H. and H. C. Overall (eds.) Analytical Index to the Series of Records Known as the Remembrancia of the City of London, (London, 1878), hereafter cited as Remembrancia, Index, p. 338.

markes on the dores bee not taken away untill
your Lordshipp so to take hart; as being assured
that an exact accompt wilbe demaunded at
your handes of your diligence and industrie in
this occassion.²

Later the lord mayor was called before their
"ordships "and received ... severe admonition for to take
all the strictest courses that might be used for prevention
of the spreading of the plague, to the effect of the
letters formerly written unto him, and to take a like course
for clearing the streets of all roagues and beggars of all
sexes and ages, and the houses of inmates, and he was
required weckely to give an accompt to the "board of his
proceedinges therein."³ Because measures taken in the
city could effect nothing unless carried out also in the
suburbs, the council ordered the justices of the peace of
Middlesex, Surrey, and Westminster to attend the next council
meeting to receive similar instructions. The justices were
ordered to

use their best endeavors, and with greater
diligence then hitherto they have done, as
well by taking present and continual care in
their severall districtes, that the streetes
be kept very cleane, all vagrant persons
punished, and inmates removed, as by all
other possible and fitting courses; because
otherwise not onely the suburbs and other
places neare the cittie wilbe in manifest

2

Privy Council to the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of
London, March 28, 1625, Acts of the Privy Council
1625-1626, p. 8; Remembrancia, Index, p. 338.

3

Order in Council, March 31, 1625, Acts of the
Privy Council 1625-1626, p. 15.

danger of receiving the infection, but allso that infeccion which is already in the cittie is lykely to be increassed thereby, notwithstanding any care that can be taken by the lord mayor and aldermen who complaine of those vagarant persons and multitude of poore coming out of the country partes, by which the cittie is annoyed and pestered.⁴

By mid July the privy council found it necessary to reprimand the lord mayor and aldermen of London and the justices of the suburbs. The orders issued in the spring were not being carried out properly and there was evidence of laxity or complete disregard by the officials.

Whereas by reason of the great infeccion and other extraordinary occasions for his Majestie's service at this time, not onley his royal person is now absent from the cittie of London but wee of his Privy Councell are forced to disperse ourselves more than at any other time hath been usuall; we have thought fitt to praie and require your Lordshipp not to abandon the government of the cittie committed to your charge and to continue and encrease all the usuall meanes for repressing of the contagion, both by restrayning the infected persons and shutting all the houses, and all other courses accustomed in the like lamentable occassions, and in no sort to remitt the diligence requisite, notwithstanding the increase of the contagion, untill it shall please almighty God of his mercy to cease his indignacion, wherein you ought to be so much the more severe least the contempt of the publike authoritye in the orders appointed for the infeccion may produce and encourage a further disobedience in the government and adde one mischief to another; and wee doe further praie and require your Lordshipp and the rest to bee very vigilant upon all other emergent accidentes which may concerne the government,

4

Order in Council, April 1, 1625, Acts of the Privy Council 1625-1626, pp. 17- 8.

and to be very carefull to give all speedy redress in them that may lie in your power, and to give diligent advertisement thereof unto one of his Majestie's principall Secretaries or to some such other of his Privy Councell as you shall understand to be neereast at hand and to whome the care thereof may most properlie belong.⁵

Letters of the same type were sent to the justices of peace of Middlesex and Surrey telling them to keep the orders against the infection and to stay at their posts.⁶

John Gore, lord mayor at this time, reported to the council that he had used "all diligence" in obeying the council's orders and would continue the personal execution of his charge. plague was not as strong inside the walls as it was on the outskirts of the city according to his report.⁷

The city of Bristol became alarmed for its safety during the plague and requested the privy council to forbid Londoners to attend Bristol fairs or to send goods to the markets there. The mayor of Bristol petitioned the council asking that all Londoners with "their goodes and merchandizes might be absolutely restrayned" from attending the fair to be held there.⁸ The lord mayor

⁵ Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London and the Justices of Peace of Middlesex and Surrey, July 20, 1625, Acts of the Privy Council 1625-1626, p. 123; Remembrancia, Index, p. 338.

⁷ Lord Mayor (John Gore) to the Council, July 20, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 76; Remembrancia, Index, p. 339.

⁶ Acts of the Privy Council 1625-1626, p. 123.

⁸ Order in Council, June 25, 1625, Acts of the Privy Council 1625-1626, p. 109.

and aldermen of London prayed the privy council "that the restraint may not apply to those who shall obtain certificates from the Lord Mayor that their houses and families are free from infection."⁹ A proclamation was ordered, however, restraining Londoners from attending the Bristol fair.¹⁰

The plague deaths of the first week in August rose to 3,659 in London, with an additional ninety-seven dying in Westminster,¹¹ when the privy council wrote to the archbishops of Canterbury and York ordering a fast and forbidding any assemblies in the churches of infected parishes. The people were to abstain from publicly keeping the fast ordered by the king, but were "to observe the said fast and other devotion accompanying the same privately in their houses." Church services were to be carefully watched, and the privy council ordered "that the churchwardens be further carefull in the publique assemblies which shalbe made for the said fast in the parishes cleere from infection not to admitt any from the parishes infected to their said publique assemblies which might els proove a lykely meanes to pass the contagion to the places which yett remaine cleare".¹²

⁹ Lord Mayor (John Gore) and Aldermen of London to the Council, June, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 51; Remembrancia, Index, p. 339.

¹⁰ Proclamation ordered by the Court of Aldermen, July 5, 1625, Repertories, 39, fol. 268.

¹¹ Locke to Carleton, August 14, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 84; Also bill of mortality for 1625, French p. xxviii; Creighton, pp. 508-9.

At the same time the council again reprimanded the lord mayor for the number of vagrants in the city.

Whereas we are given to understand that divers loose and vagrant persons have bene observed to pass daly to and fro in and about London ministering suspiccion that their stay is for noe good intent, but as may be well feared to make prey by pilfering and breaking upp of houses of such citizns and other persons which are left empty of any servaunt to looke to them (a thing practized as wee heare by dissolute and desperate persons in tymes of former contagion and plague); wee, out of our accustomed care to omitt nothing which wee can possibly thinke of tending to the preservation of the lyves and estates as well of those citizens and others still commorant in and about London as also of those who are retyred into the country, have thought good hereby to pray and require your Lordshipp to take such speedy and effectuall order with the justices of peace and other officers within your jurisdiction that they use all vigilance and circumspeccion for the preventing what possibly they may of any mischief of that kind which mought otherwise happen and be attempted, especially upon the houses and goods of those that are absent, and that justice may be done with all severitie upon such offenders as shalbe apprehended and found guiltie.¹²

The order of the judges of assize of the circuit of Essex forbidding the entrance of all "higglers" and other carriers into the city of London had to be rescinded by the council at this same time. The lord

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Privy Council to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, August 5, 1625, Acts of the Privy Council 1625-1626, p. 125.

¹³

Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London, August 5, 1625, Acts of the Privy Council 1625-1626, pp. 127-28.

mayor complained that the people suffered so much from hunger ~~he~~ was afraid the few remaining magistrates would not be able to keep order in the city, and that the hungry would leave the city to go into the country in search of food, thereby spreading the infection over a much wider area.¹⁴ The council thereupon agreed that it should again be lawful for higgiers and other carriers to come into London, and that if they did not want to come into the city their provisions could be marketed a short distance outside the city.¹⁵

Another problem brought up by the privy council concerned the graves in which the plague victims were buried. During the worst part of the plague in August a letter was sent to the Bishop of London charging him "to have especiall care taken that as well the burying of too many together in one and the same grave be avoyded as much as may be, as lykewise that the graves be digged soe deepe as that those bodies which lye next to the superficies of the earth may be interred and covered three foote deepe at the least, the contrarie whereof being generally observed to be now practized cannot choose but be a great occacion of the increase of the infeccion by corrupting of the ayre in greater measure."¹⁶

¹⁴ Lord Mayor (John Gore) to the Council, August 1, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 79.

¹⁵ Privy Council to the Justices of Peace in Essex, August 5, 1625, Acts of the Privy Council 1625-1626, pp. 128-29

¹⁶ Privy Council to the Lord Bishop of London, August 28, 1625, Acts of the Privy Council 1625-1626, pp. 142-43.

Those who were afflicted by the plague and had not the money with which to care for themselves were to be taken care of in the city's pest houses, and not to be allowed to wander in the streets. The council sent a letter to the lord mayor concerning pest houses, shutting up of houses, and burials:

It is soe well knowne to you what orders and dirreccions have proceeded from his Majestie and this Table for the well governing of the cittie in theise tymes of contagion and sickness as that we cannot but marvaile very much (especially as your own lyves and fortunes are so farr interested) that it is fallen into every man's observation who have beene commorant in or neere the cittie that the whole and sicke are suffered in all partes of the cittie promiscuously to converse together without any restraite att all, which being now also come to his Majestie's eare he is much troubled and offended thereat, and hath therefore (as a good and gracious Prince contynuing his royall care for the preservation of the lives of his loving subjectes which are deare and pretious unto him) comanded us hereby to lett you know how much hee is offended with this your soe greate neglect and misgovernment, and likewise in his Majestie's name straitly to charge and comand you that, besydes those good orders and direccions formerly made and given, you cause theise ensuing to be putt in due execucion, viz: —that a speedy course be taken for the erecting of smale tentes and cabbyns to be made of a few boards and such materialles as may bee soone putt together and to be sett a competent distance from each other in all such severall places and fields without the citty as shalbe most convenient to erect them in for the receaving of infected persons from all partes of the cittie, wherein you are strictly to observe this course; that soe soone as you shall understand of a house infected you cause the infected person or persons to bee removed to some of the foresaid cabbyns and those remayning in the house to be shutt upp during a mounthe's space, as formerly, and that those that are remooved into the said cabbyns be suffered at the mounthe's end if they be perfectly recovered to retourne home againe, and that the cabbyne together with their wearing clothes

and all things in itt be burned, and that from tyme to tyme new cabbyns be still erected, as occasion shall require, the charge of which if itt bee effectually proceeded in is to be borne in parte out of the benevolence, and to be collected by breefes, throughout the kingdome, according to a late order made in the Upper House of Parliament on the behalf of the said colleccion, but the disbursments for the present to bee made by the citty. And whereas it is lykewise observed that the graves made for the buriall of those whoe die of the plague are usually not digged soe deepe as were requisite to containe such numbers of bodies as happen often to be interred in one and the same grave, which cannott choose but bee a greate occasion of increase of the infeccion by corrupting of the ayre in greater measure ... we have therefore thought good hereby to will and require your Lordshipp to take the best and strictest course that possibly you can devise, both to have as few buried in one grave as may bee, as also that those bodies which lye uppermost bee not covered shallower than three foote deepe at the least. Of all which we expect from tyme to tyme an exacte ~~account~~ from you as of a busines which his Majestie takes so much to heart and will certainly require at your hands in case of any default in the execution thereof on your part.¹⁷

The lord mayor also asked the council for relief for the poor. Although many poor had died the need of those still alive was very great because of disrupted trade. He asked that the sum of £1,000 that had been collected be
18
turned over to the city for poor relief.

When the plague finally began to abate the council sent a letter to the lord mayor and aldermen asking them to continue their vigilance and not to allow the disease to spring up again. The infested parts of the city were to

¹⁷
Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London, August 28, 1625, Acts of the Privy Council 1625-1626, pp. 143-44.

¹⁸
Lord Mayor (Allen Cotton) and Aldermen of London to the Privy Council, November 22, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 155.

be carefully cleansed and all household belongings of those who had been infected were to be exposed to fire and the frosty weather which would be upon them soon. By using great diligence in carrying out this order the council assured the officials they would "encourage his Majestie to approach the sooner unto the citty and give confidence to all in general to repair thither."¹⁹

A few weeks later it was reported to the council that this order had been carried out by publishing it in every church and by telling people exactly how "to cleanse and air their houses , all beddings, apparel, and household stuffe."²⁰ A precept from the lord mayor had commanded all aldermen to have this order carried out in their particular wards,²¹ and justices of the peace reported from the outlying parishes that they were carrying out the order to "air and purify houses and stuff infected."²²

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Privy Council to the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London, and the Justices of Peace of Middlesex and Surrey, December 4, 1625, Acts of the Privy Council 1625-1626, p. 258.

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Heywood to the Council, December 29, 1625, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 191.

²¹

Precept, n.d., Journal XXXIII, fol. 198b.

²²

Justices of Peace of Middlesex to the Council, January, 1626, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1625-1626, p. 242.

A few scattered outbreaks of plague were still occurring in the spring of 1626. The privy council did not relax its vigilance, but continued to order the houses shut up and marked with the red crosses.²³ However, the epidemic itself was over and London again took up its usual way of life.

There is very little mention of the plague after the year 1625 until the year 1630 when it again broke out in epidemic form.

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Privy Council to Lidcot and Drake, May 12, 1626, Acts of the Privy Council 1625-1626, p. 471.

Chapter V
THE PRIVY COUNCIL AND THE
PLAGUE OF 1630

In the fall of 1629, plague began again to spread in Europe, and people in England became anxious for their own safety. The privy council sent an order to the port towns of England, including London, ordering them to examine carefully all incoming vessels to be sure the cargoes and those aboard were not infected with the plague. "And in case they shall be found to have come from places infected," the order continued, "that then you cause them to forbear coming on shore or unlading and likewise restrain others from going aboard or having commerce with them until such course first by them be taken for the airing of their goods and commodities."¹ A precept was sent to the aldermen of London from the lord mayor telling them to warn all householders not to entertain any persons or goods from any of the places named (Amsterdam, Rochelle, and the port towns from Brittany), and "to urge every householder to keep his house sweet and clean, as also the channels in the streets, and to avoid lodging or harbouring

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Privy Council to the magistrates and officers of several port towns, October 28, 1629, Privy Council Register (microfilm of MSS. deposited in the Public Records Office, hereafter cited as pC 2739), p. 468; Dorchester to Coventry, October 16, 1629, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1629-1631, p. 80; A recommendation to the council to act, Remembrancia, Index, pp. 339-40.

any unknown persons."²

In early spring of the following year, 1630, the privy council was busy issuing a series of orders to London and the surrounding area concerning plague control. The officials of those London areas which were visited by the plague were given orders to close infected houses and were told to set watches before each house to make sure those afflicted did not leave the house and thus spread the infection over a greater area.³ The council also ordered the king's printer to reissue the "Book of Orders" dealing with plague regulations and to mail it to "such towns, villages, and other places as might be infected with the plague."⁴

In an effort to keep plague under control in Middlesex, near London, the council sent the following letter to the justices of the peace of that county:

Whereas, by our letters of the twelfth of this month we did will and require you to take special care for the shutting up of all such houses as you should be informed were infected with the plague, and that no access should be admitted to any person therein;

²
Precept to the aldermen, October 27, 1629, Journal XXXV, fol. 119b.

³
Privy Council to the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London, March 12, 1630, pC 2/39, pp. 689-90; Remembrancia, Index, p. 340.

⁴
Order in Council, March 15, 1630, pC 2/39, p. 696.

forasmuch as upon farther consideration we find that the danger doth require a more effectual remedy for the preventing and stopping thereof, We do therefore hereby will and require you to meet forthwith at Hicks Hall in Westminster and there consult and resolve on some convenient place or places to which the persons dwelling in those houses that are or shall happen to be infected may be speedily removed, with careful order for the attending and relief of all such as are poor and destitute of means, which place or places being resolved on, you are to see the aforesaid persons to be presently sent thither and their houses safely shut up. Now because the multitude of poor Irish and other vagabond persons who swarm hereabouts must needs increase the infection unless some effectual means be used for the redress of that disorder, we do therefore likewise will and require you to take special care that the county may be freed from all such kind of people, according to the law in the case provided, and also diligently to inform yourselves what number of inmates and alehouses are in every parish, and to see the laws duly and strictly executed against them, that the excessive multitude of them, which ought at no time to be tolerated and is now most dangerous, may be repressed. You are in like manner to use your best care that all filth may be removed out of the streets and they kept clean and as sweet as may be, and the ditches and the common sewers thoroughly cleansed and the sluices opened, that the water may have its free passage. And for that purpose you are to enjoin the Commissioners for Sewers and the scavengers respectively to be very careful to perform their duties. And, to the end all these things may the better be performed, we think fit that you divide yourselves according to the several precincts or parishes. And we do withall hereby enjoin and charge you to give us an exact account of all your proceedings in every of these particulars from time to time, which we expect shall not be less than once in ten days, observance for that part for which he sic shall understand and for which he is to answer.⁵

In a reconsideration of their earlier order to London

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Privy Council to the Justices of Peace of Middlesex, March 17, 1630, PC 2/39, pp. 698-99.

concerning the shutting up of houses, the council now ordered London officials to send all infected to the pest houses and keep them there. The lord mayor was also ordered to punish all vagrants and to keep the city and the liberties free of vagabonds.⁶ The same day the council sent orders to the same effect to the justices of the peace of Westminster and Surrey mentioning the badly infected parishes of St. Giles in the Fields, Shoreditch, and Whitechapel.⁷ The College of Physicians was also notified:

Whereas we are informed that divers houses in several parishes near the City of London are infected with the plague, which may prove of dangerous consequence if the farther spreading thereof cannot be stopped in time; We have therefore thought fit to signify unto you that his Majesty out of his gracious and princely care of the health and safety of his loving subjects hath been pleased to commend that you assemble yourselves and confer upon some fit course to be taken and observed for the better preventing of the infection, whereof we will and require you to give us a particular account with all expedition.⁸

The lord mayor took immediate action on all points of the council order of March 18 and sent a precept to the aldermen the same day to take certain measures for pre-

⁶ Privy Council to the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London, March 18, 1630, PC 2/39, p. 700; Remembrancia, Index, p. 840.

⁷ Privy Council to the Justices of the Peace of Westminster and Surrey, March 18, 1630, PC 2/39, pp. 701-2.

⁸ Privy Council to the College of Physicians, March 18, 1630, PC 2/39, p. 704.

venting the plague. This order is for the "apprehending and punishinge of all poore Irishe and other vagrants and vagabond persons" found in the ward. Streets and lanes and channels in the streets are to be kept "sweet and clean and no dung, soil, filth, or other noysome thing [are to] be suffered to be and remain in the said streets and lanes but to be from time to time cleaned and voided." The aldermen were also to "take measures" against an excessive number of inmates, alehouses, "and like disordered houses." The lord mayor added that "a strict account will undoubtedly be required of you touching the performance of the premises."⁹

The privy council also took notice of those single cases of plague infection which were brought to the attention of its members. Letters were sent to the lord mayor and the justices concerning certain single cases which were reported and the council ordered an immediate check of the houses to verify the reports and close the houses if the reports were true.¹⁰

As plague continued to increase the lord mayor sent another precept to the aldermen:

We, considering how the infection of the plague is dispersed in divers and sundry places near about

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Precept to the aldermen, upon a letter from the Privy Council, March 18, 1630, Journal XXXV, fol. 169.

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Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London; Sir John Lidcott and Sir Thomas Evelyn; Mr. Louthier, Mr. Muskett, and other justices about Whitechapel; Dr. Bate and Sir William Slingsby, April 9, 1630, PC 2/39, pp. 745-46; Remembrancia, Index, p. 341.

this City do for the prevention of the increase thereof within the said City (so far as it shall please God to bless mans endeavors) hereby straightly charge and in his Majesty's name command all manner of persons within the said city and liberties thereof to take notice of and observe these several Articles ensuing, vizt.:

1. Houses and streets before them are to be daily cleaned.
2. That no beggars gather in multitudes at burials or lectures to seek alms.
3. No beggar or vagrant to wander in or remain in the city or liberties.
4. No feasts or meetings at halls or taverns of countrymen of any shire.
5. No "wrestlinges and fencers' prises, Showes or the like" which causes multitudes.
6. No seller of fruit, cabbage, roots, or herbs to lay these things up in his warehouse.¹¹

This action by the lord mayor anticipated by a day a royal proclamation "for quickening the laws made for relief of the poor, suppressing, punishing, and settling sturdy rogues and vagabonds, issued on account of the apparent and visible danger of the pestilence."¹²

Still another precept to the aldermen forbade feasts and public dinners, and public meetings for burials and marriages. The money saved by this measure was to be collected for the relief of the poor.¹³ All actions of the lord mayor and the justices of the peace of neighboring counties were based upon orders from the privy council,¹⁴ whose members were showing great interest in the welfare of the people during the days of the infection.

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Precept to the aldermen, April 22, 1630, Journal XXXV, fol. 180b.

¹²

Proclamation, April 23, 1630, Rymer, *Foedera*, v. XI^A, p. 160; *Cal. S. P. Dom. 1629-1631*, p. 241.

¹³

Precept to the aldermen, May 17, 1630, Journal XXXV, 182.

In spite of the concern shown by the council and the care exercised by the governing officials of the city, the plague was so threatening in London that to permit anyone from the city or its environs to approach the king's court was to endanger the lives of members of the royal family. When the Queen, whose lying in was approaching, prepared to move to the royal palace at Greenwich, east of London, the justices of the peace of Greenwich were charged not to permit anyone from the vicinity of London to approach the palace or village of Greenwich.¹⁵

Whether the lord mayor did his very best to keep down the plague no one can say. But his efforts, whatever they were, did not satisfy the lords of His Majesty's privy council. Their letter to him on April 10 complained that he was not using "strict care" in enforcing measures to control the pestilence and was not making sure that all infected houses were closed and marked with the red cross and the words "Lord Have Mercy On Us." Similar reprimands were also sent to the Justices of Westminster and

¹⁶ Middlesex. The plague increased as the weather grew

¹⁴ Order in Council, April 14, 1630; Privy Council to the Justices of the Peace of Middlesex, April 20, 1630, PC 2/39, pp. 752, 763; Remembrancia, Index, April 14, 1630, p. 341.

¹⁵ Privy Council to the Justices of Peace of Greenwich, April 10, 1630, PC 2/39, p. 746. Prince Charles, the later King Charles II, was born May 29, 1630.

¹⁶ Letter to the Lord Mayor of London and the Justices of the Peace of Westminster and Middlesex, April 10, 1630, PC 2/39, p. 748.

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warmer, and in mid-May the privy council again communicated with the lord mayor saying "that there has been much intercourse between infected persons and sound ones, without any respect of our several former directions." The aldermen of the several wards were to put an end to such practices, and any violators were to be shut up in their own houses or sent to the pesthouse. Watchmen were to be placed at all infected houses.¹⁸ The officials were also warned to commit only Londoners to the pesthouse and to see that necessary provisions were supplied to them so they would not be forced to go out in search of food.¹⁹

As the chief port in England London was exposed to the danger that the epidemic might be made worse as ships from infested continental ports anchored in the Thames. A vivid account of an incident fraught with such danger appeared in a council order of May 24:

Upon information this day brought to their Lordships that there were now riding in the rive Thames, between Deptford and Blackwall near unto one of his Majesty's principle houses of resort, two French ships whose mariners and company being infected with the plague, did not only permit divers of his Majesty's subjects that were sound and free of the said infectious disease to repair unto them and to traffic with them, but also cast the corpses of those that died of the said malady into the said river, and by those means did endanger the lives of

¹⁷ Russell to Porter, May 10, 1630, Cal. S. p. Dom. 1629-1631, p. 254.

¹⁸ Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London, May 18, 1630 PC 2/39, p. 802; Journal XXXV, fol. 187; Repertories XLIV, May 3, 1630, fol. 228; Remembrancia, Index, p. 343.

¹⁹ May 11, 1630, Reportories XLIV, fol. 233b.

his Majesty's subjects through the spreading and increase of the said contagion; now forasmuch as their lordships by his Majesty's express command are directed to use all possible care and industry to prevent the spreading of this mortality and by all good ways (as much as in them lieth) to preserve the lives of his good and loving subjects; their lordships upon mature deliberation and advice this day taken at the Board touching this business thought fit and ordered that Sir Henry Martin, Knt, Judge of the Admiralty, shall be required as soon as may be to call the marshall of the said court unto him and to give him strict charge immediately to repair unto the said infected ships and to command the masters and companies thereof both in their lordships name and the name of the said court forthwith to fall down toward the river's mouth as low as they can, and either to ride there at anchor a good distance from the shore for a short time untill they be furnished with necessaries to carry them to sea or else if they be already fitted for that purpose, presently to depart and shape their course towards the place from whence they came or any other so as they do not come unto any of his Majesty's ports, nor during their stay in the river use any trade with their infected goods, cast the dead into the waters, nor suffer those of their company that are tainted with the contagion to converse with his Majesty's subjects that are whole and sound. And it was farther ordered by the Board that the Clerk of the Council attending shall wait upon the French Ambassador now residing here and acquaint him with his their lordships' order and resolution on that behalf.²⁰

The plague deaths in London in 1630 do not seem to have risen to any such numbers as in earlier and later epidemics. The city proper was almost free of plague in early summer when compared to other districts in England.²¹ A contemporary writer reported "there died of the sickness

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Order in Council, May 24, 1630, PC 2/39, p. 797.

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Wollaston to Harley, June 26, 1630, MSS. of the Duke of Portland, (H.M.C., 14th Rep. App. Pt. II) p. 27.

the last week but 64, and of them but a few within
the walls."²² The council did continue to send
periodic messages to London officials encouraging them
to keep up their work in closing houses, keeping the
streets clean, and so on, and reprimanding them if they
were reported to be negligent in their duties. Much
attention was centered on poor relief, for it was the poor
who suffered most as they did in any plague.²³

Much of the council's dealings were with plague
infected areas just outside the city of London as in the
following letter to the justices of Westminster:

Though there have been so many good and
wholesome laws provided to meet with and punish all
disorders and inconveniences that may either tend
to the breach of civil government or the impairing
of the health of his Majesty's subjects as there
can be nothing more desired; yet because we find
that there is not care and diligence used for the
execution thereof as were fit, and especially in
this time of infection when the neglect may be more
prejudicial than at other times; we have therefore
thought good to recommend unto your better care the
execution of these things hereafter following within
the City of Westminster and the liberties thereof.

First, that you take care that the statute of
Inmates be duly put in execution, that no householder
shall give entertainment to men, their wives and
children as inmates, upon pain of imprisonment and
fine, as by the law in that case is provided.

That all dwellers in the town and liberties do

22

Sir Philip Percivalle to his cousin, Edmund
Percivalle, June 13, 1630, MSS. of the Earle of Arundel,
(H.M.C. v. 1, pt. 1) p. 87.

23

King to all Archbishops, Justices of the Peace, and
all other officers, June 25, 1630, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1629-
1631, p. 289; Warrant to pay to Bishop Laud ... for poor
relief, July 28, 1630, p. 314; Leonard, English Poor Relief,
pp. 132-44, 184-205.

keep their sinks, channels and counters very clean.

That there be not so many tobacco sellers suffered, which are the occasion of many inconveniences.

That all the alehouses which are suppressed at this time by the justices shall so continue and that they shall rather suppress more than increase any but by licence from the justices of peace, according to the statute. And that tipplers and alehouse haunTERS be punished.

That on the Sabbath days no tippling, gaming, tobacco taking or needless and unlawful assemblies of water playing and such like be permitted.

That sheds and underbuildings which are very dangerous both by entertaining of poor people for fire and for infection may be pulled down.

That swine and dogs be not suffered to go about the streets.

That all unuseful ponds and pools within the City of Westminster and liberties thereof be stopped and dammed up, for that they cause an evil air which breedeth the infection. Of all these things we will expect a good and speedy account at your hands. And for the better encouragement of the constables, informers and others that shall any way further the execution of these our directions, we require you that of such penalties as shall be inflicted upon the offenders (in such sort as by the laws provided in that behalf is ordained) to see them rewarded according to their defects.²⁴

The fair at Bristol was held in the summer of 1630, in spite of the plague, and the privy council decided that any Londoner with a certificate from the lord mayor should be allowed to enter the city of Bristol to attend the fair and to transact business there. The plague threat was not regarded as dangerous enough to prevent Londoners from attending the fair.²⁵

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Privy Council to the Justices of Peace of Westminster, May 31, 1630, PC 2/39, p. 831.

²⁵

Privy Council to the mayor of Bristol, July 13, 1630 PC 2/40, p. 75.

By August, and in the autumn months, the plague had increased to greater proportions in London and the surrounding area,²⁶ and the Bartholomew Fair, the Stourbridge Fair, and Our Lady Fair in Southwark were cancelled.²⁷ A man going to London on business found "none of the Lords in town but the Lord Marshal and Lord Falkland, and none near the town but the Lords Keeper and Treasurer, and no business to do."²⁸ In September the Michaelmas term was adjourned,²⁹ because the king and court had earlier left the city for the safety of the country³⁰ and were, as yet, unable to return.

There are indications that the privy council in 1630 kept stricter watch over the plague and more sternly

²⁶ Henry, Earl of Kent, and Thomas, Earl of Cleveland, Lord Lieutenants of co. Bedford, to the Council, October 28, 1630, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1629-1631, p. 368; Earl of Exeter to (Sir Gervase Clifton) September 17, October 15, 18, 1630, (H. M. C., MSS in Various collections, VII,) pp. 396-99.

²⁷ Proclamation, August 1, 1630, Rymer, Foedera, XIX, p. 185; Cal. S. P. Dom. 1629-1631, p. 319.

²⁸ Becher to Dorchester, August 2, 1630, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1629-1631, p. 320.

²⁹ Rymer, Foedera, XIX, p. 192.

³⁰ Soranzo to the Doge, April 26, 1630, (n.s.), Cal. S. P. Ven. 1629-1632, p. 329.

enforced measures to prevent its spread than was true in 1625. This attention by the council is reflected in new measures taken by the lord mayor of London. In early summer the lord mayor added two "searchers" of bodies to the two always employed in each parish. Two were to examine the bodies of those known to have died of the plague and the other two were to view bodies of those not supposed to have died of the plague. The two former, as always, must carry a red wand and walk in the channels of the streets, so that contact with them might be avoided.³¹

The order restricting feasts by the companies and ordering them to turn over one-half of the money saved to the aldermen for distribution to the poor³² was a change from the earlier order allowing them to distribute the money themselves to their own poor. It was a wise move because the difficulty formerly involved in collecting this money proved that the companies had not been doing much poor relief on their own.³³

Late in the year 1630 the privy council received letters from the surrounding villages, in answer to the

31

Precept to the Aldermen, June 12, 1630, Journal XXXV, fol. 203b.

32

Precept to the Mr and Wardens of companies, October 1, 1630, Journal XXXV, fol. 232.

33

Precept to Mr and Wardens of companies, October 1, December 15, 1630, Journal XXXV, fols. 232, 260.

council's request, telling of their progress in combatting the plague. They had followed all orders from the council in order to prevent the plague and were now sending in lists of those citizens who had been "guilty of breach of orders during the time of the late visitation of the plague."³⁴ The privy council earlier had sent a letter of praise to some of these justices, but it warned against any false hopes for the sudden decline of the plague.³⁵

The lord Mayor of London was held strictly accountable for negligence in carrying out the orders of the council:

It is well known unto you and cannot but be fresh in your remembrance what orders and directions have been given both by his Majesty and this Board for the better prevention of the increase and spreading of infection. Notwithstanding which as is generally observed, and as it is represented to his Majesty and this Board, such is found to be the remissness and negligence, whether in superior magistrates as your Lordship and the rest chiefly entrusted therewith, or in your subordinate ministers and officers (of whom it seems you take not so strict an account as you ought) as we cannot but exceedingly marvel at and much blame you for. And amongst other ill effects arising from such your negligence and omission of your duties, these in particular are especially noted, vizt.:

The ill choice of those that are appointed for searchers, or the impunity of them when they are found to abuse the trust reposed in them by concealing infection.

34

Justices of Peace for Westminster to the Council, November 2, 1630; Justices of Peace for Southwark, November 5, 1630; Justices of Peace for Middlesex to the Council, November 6, 1630; Justices of Peace for the Tower Hamlets to the Council, 1630 (?), Cal. S. P. Dom. 1629-1631, pp. 375, 371, 454.

The not shutting up of infected houses so timely as is requisite and the not setting up of marks and usual inscriptions upon the doors, or the suffering them to be taken off after they are set up.

The not keeping of diligent and strict watches upon the said houses so shut up, and the not careful taking account of them, that they do their duty.

The not affording sufficient maintenance to such persons infected as are of the poorer sort so shut up, whereby they are necessitated to come abroad for relief.

The carrying of those to burial that die of the sickness through the streets, too early in the night before the streets be empty, and the suffering of company to follow the corpse.

The speedy reformation of all which neglects and abuses and the due putting in execution of all such instructions and orders which have been formerly given you on that behalf as we do in his Majesty's name and by his express command strictly require at your hands. So we likewise require that you forthwith diligently examine and find out what persons are most particularly in default herein, and that you cause them to be punished according to their several demerits, and that you certify us within ten days next after the date hereof the names of such persons as you shall find defaulters, and what punishment you have inflicted on any of them; or otherwise we let you to know that his Majesty will (as he conceives he hath just cause) impute it unto you as chiefly in default and accordingly call you to a strict account for the same.³⁵

The lord mayor wasted no time in acting upon this order and within a few days had sent a precept to the aldermen, repeating in detail the privy council's criticisms. He ordered the aldermen to notify him the

35

Privy Council to the Justices of Peace of Middlesex and Surrey, September 26, 1630, PC 2/40, p. 111.

36

Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London, October 24, 1630, PC 2/40, p. 135.

names of any persons or officers "derelict in duty" so that they could be reported to the council. The aldermen were warned to be "especially diligent in seeing these orders carried out in the future." All "vagrants, beggars, idle and loose persons" were to be seized, and each parish was to set up a whipping post, "if there is not a post up already," and the vagrants were to be whipped and sent from the city.³⁷ In a later precept to the aldermen the lord mayor reported: "constables have been neglecting their duty of punishing vagrants, etc., and scavengers have been neglecting their duty of keeping streets cleane. The streets are foul and dirty and the city is much pestered with beggars, idle persons, etc." The lord mayor was again being blamed by the king and the privy council for negligence and he told the aldermen to increase their vigilance over the duties of the constables and scavengers and check their work every fourteen days. All who were neglectful of their duty were to be reported by the aldermen to the lord mayor.³⁸

By February, 1631, the lord mayor of London was able to report to the privy council that "the sickness has

³⁷

Precept to the aldermen, October 28, 1630, Journal XXXV, fol. 236b.

³⁸

Precept to the aldermen, November 29, 1630, Journal XXXV, fol. 252b.

wholly ceased within the walls of the city; the infection which remains is for the most part in
 39
 Middlesex."

The privy council, however, was cautious about accepting the lord mayor's assurances. In March, when the approaching summer might witness a new outbreak, the council warned the lord mayor not to relax his vigilance.

You may easily conceive what danger is threatened by the continuing infection, and the season of the year drawing on towards summer, the consideration whereof hath moved us to charge your lordship again with the careful performance of those directions which you have received from this Board in that behalf, the rather because we are informed of some neglects, which not being redressed may cause a general spreading of the contagion. We do therefore hereby expressly require you that besides your care in all other particulars, you take present and effectual order that according to the ancient constitutions and custom the searchers and they that look to infected persons shall always carry white wands in the hands when they go abroad, whereby they may be distinguished from others, that every infected house have a large red cross on the door, and likewise the ordinary Bill of Lord Have Mercy Upon Us over the door placed in such sort that it may be plainly seen by the passers by, and that there be continual and diligent watches before every such house, through default whereof the crosses are often wiped out and the Bills torn down, and lastly that the scavengers be enjoined and charged to see the streets kept as clean as may be, they will answer the neglect. Your Lordship is also to take like order that whereas houses touched with infection are

39

Sir Robert Ducie, Lord Mayor of London, to the Council, February 8, 1631, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1629-1631, p. 501.

kept shut for the space of a month only; from henceforth you permit not any to be opened until forty days be fully expired, as is used in other counties and found by experience to be the safer course.⁴⁰

The council also met and considered the recommendations of the king's physicians and the members of the College of Physicians in London for further orders to prevent the spread of the sickness. Although there was not a raging plague in the city, the council was showing foresight⁴¹ and planning to prevent a recurrence.

There were very few plague deaths in London in 1630. The outparishes reported 524 deaths, the liberties 603, and within the walls 190 had died. The total for the year⁴² was only 1,317.

40

Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London, March 14, 1631, PC 2/40, p. 396.

41

Order in Council, March 30, 1631, PC 2/40, p. 421. The College of Physicians had presented a list of "Annoyances" to the council earlier in 1630. "These are, increase of buildings in and about the City; inmates by whom the houses are so pestered that they become unwholesome; neglect of cleansing of common sewers and town ditches, and permitting standing ponds in divers Inns; uncleanness of streets; the Leastalls so near the City, especially on the north side; the slaughter-houses in the City; burying of infected people in the churches and churchyards of the City; that the churches are overlaid with burials; the carrying up of funnels to the tops of houses from privies, and from vaults of the dead; the selling of musty corn in the public markets, or bakers baking unwholesome corn; butchers killing unsound cattle; tainted fish." April 20, 1630, College of physicians MSS. (H.M.C., 8th Rep. App. Pt. 1) p. 229.

42

Wilson, Plague in Shakespeare's London, pp. 211-12, taken from a Table of Burials, and Christenings in London.

Chapter VI
THE PRIVY COUNCIL AND THE
PLAGUE OF 1636

Late in the year 1635 a royal proclamation forbade the landing of men or goods from ships coming from "parts of France, or the Low Countries now infected with the Plague." The infected goods were not to be allowed in England until they had passed a period of quarantine¹ and were certified free from plague. This was the first evidence of another wave of plague which was about to sweep over England.

The plague began to increase in the spring of the year 1636, and the privy council again went into action to combat its further spread. Orders were sent out to the lord mayor of London and to the justices of the peace of Middlesex, Westminster and Surrey.

Whereas it doth appear that the plague doth begin to break out in some of the skirts of the City and that the time of the year and the temper of the weather may humanely give us just cause of apprehension that the said sickness may probably encrease, we have thought fit to pray and require your lordship and the rest to give a meeting once or twice every week to some of the justices of Middlesex, Surrey and Westminster (to whom we have written to that purpose) and there to advise (upon consideration of the courses used heretofore upon the like occasions or such other as the emergent occasions may suggest) what course shall be now held

¹ Rymer, Foedera, XIX, p. 696; Correr to the Doge, November 23, 1635 (n. s.), Cal. S. P. Ven. 1632-1636, p. 480.

for the preventing or stay of the increase of the plague and with all speed and industry to put the same in execution. And as upon your deliberation you shall find it requisite to resort unto us either for further authority or advice, you shall find us always ready to afford you all fitting countenance and assistance. So if you shall neglect the performance of your duties herein to the best of your powers, we cannot interpret it but as a very great contempt towards his Majesty in a business so much concerning the public preservation, and shall accordingly require an account of it, if we shall find any slackness used therein by any of those whom it concerns.²

A fortnight later the council sent out orders strengthening their former commands and asking for an immediate report from the justices.³

In obedience to the council order of April 7, a precept was immediately issued by the lord mayor, giving instructions for the treatment of vagrants, the cleansing of the streets, and the other precautions usually taken.⁴ The council also requested the lord mayor to have printed orders issued to help prevent the spread of infection, and to see that the churchwardens, overseers of the poor, and constables of every parish were provided with the printed books. The physicians of the city were "to renew the

² Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London and the Justices of Peace of Middlesex, Surrey and Westminster, April 7, 1636, PC 2/46, p. 87; Remembrancia, Index, p. 346.

³ Privy Council to the Justices of Peace of Middlesex, April 22, 1636, PC 2/46, pp. 102-3.

⁴ Precept to the aldermen, April 12, 1636, Journal, XXXVII, fol. 173.

former books touching their medicines against the infection and to add unto and after the same, as they find the present times and occasions to require, and to cause the said book to be forthwith printed."⁵ The lord mayor also ordered the fee of the pest-house keeper to be increased from twenty shillings to forty shillings, since the higher prices of the day warranted the keeper's receiving more money.⁶

In late April the justices of the peace for the Tower Division of Middlesex, a quarter just outside the city walls where French Huguenot weavers were settled, reported their proceedings in plague control:

1. They have caused every house wherein any one had been visited with the plague to be shut up and watched by day and night, and such of the houses as were not of the French congregation they had furnished with competent allowance.
2. They had sworn special searchers, buryers, and bearers, with convenient allowance.
3. They had made a tax of \$100 on every parish in their division.
4. They had given order for choosing out fit places for building huts or sheds for placing the infected in.
5. They had made out warrants for a return of all such as harbour inmates and lodgers, and intend to proceed against them as a general nuisance.⁷

⁵ Order in Council, April 22, 1636, PC 2/46, p. 105; Remembrancia, Index, p. 346.

⁶ Precept to the aldermen, April 21, 1636, Journal, XXXVII, fols. 178, 190b.

⁷ Certificate of Sir William Balfour and others, Justices of Peace for the Tower Division, to the Council, April 27, 1636, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1635-1636, pp. 385-86.

The privy council sent a letter of approval to the justices, commending them for their good work and directing them to continue to carry out all necessary precautions.⁸

To safeguard against importation of the plague from foreign lands, the council repeated its order forbidding contact with ships recently arrived from overseas which might anchor in the Thames, and charging those in authority to imprison any Englishman who attempted to have dealings with those aboard.⁹

Early in May a Londoner wrote his friend in the country that plague had not yet "reached the hart of the City,"¹⁰ but another reported that it had struck the edge of the city in Cripplegate ward.¹¹ The privy council, moving quickly to the attack, forbade bear-baitings, public dinners, and public burials and weddings.¹² Large

⁸ Privy Council to the Justices of Peace of Middlesex in the Tower Division, PC 2/46, p. 127.

⁹ Privy Council to the Farmers and Officers of His Majesty's Customs, and to the portreeve of Gravesend, April 29, 1636, PC 2/46, pp. 117-18.

¹⁰ Robert Leek to Sir Gervase Clifton, May 5, 1636, MSS. in Various Collections (H. M. C.), VII, p. 413.

¹¹ John Nicholas to his son, Edward Nicholas, May 10, 1636, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1635-1636, p. 420.

¹² Order in Council, May 10, 11, 1636, PC 2/46, pp. 143, 144, 148.

gatherings of people were extremely dangerous in time of plague, and the lord mayor immediately acted upon the order in Council.¹³ Shortly thereafter, the clergy within the cities of London and Westminster were commanded to cancel the usual activities of Ascension Week.¹⁴

In mid-May the lord mayor received a stern letter from the lords of the privy council, stating that they had observed that there were various infected houses where the red crosses and the inscriptions were set so high upon the doors that they were "hardly discernible," and that the houses themselves were not properly watched. Infected persons had been seen sitting on their door steps and were not being kept under quarantine. "We think fit," the lords added, "that for those officers or others that have failed of their duties in not setting up the said inscriptions and crosses in such public places of the doors as they ought, that your lordship should forthwith commit them to Newgate as an example to others."¹⁵ Obediently the lord mayor sent out a precept to the aldermen ordering them to have the churchwardens make sure that infected houses were properly marked and guarded, and that no people were allowed to sit

¹³ Precept to the Masters and Wardens of the Companies, May (?), 1636, Journal, XXXVII, fol. 173b.

¹⁴ Order in Council, May 18, 1636, PC 2/46, p. 170.

¹⁵ Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London, May 11, 1636, PC 2/46, p. 143; Remembrancia, Index, pp. 346-47.

on their door steps and converse with passers-by.¹⁶ At the same time the council discovered two other possible causes for the spreading of the epidemic, and issued orders to counteract them. All those who gathered rags in the streets were commanded to cease their activities, and the Thames watermen, who plied a transport service on the river between London and Westminster, were ordered not to use any more cushions or mats on board their boats, since this might be a "very dangerous" way of spreading the infection.¹⁷ And again the aldermen also ordered all dogs to be killed and payment of two pence upon "presenting the nose of every such dog."¹⁸

The Venetian ambassador to England informed his government that the king was considering making a trip to Ireland if the plague increased to any greater violence.¹⁹ But Charles remained within the country, taking refuge at Hampton Court, "being driven by the violence of the plague, which has spread to almost all the parishes of the city and

¹⁶ Precept to the aldermen, May 12, 1636, Journal, XXXVII, fol. 181.

¹⁷ Order in Council, May 11, 1636, PC 2/46, p. 148.

¹⁸ Order of the Court of Aldermen, May 24, 1636, Repertories, L, fol. 228b.

¹⁹ Correr to the Doge, April 25, 1636 (n. s.), Cal. S. P. Ven. 1632-1636, p. 550.

20

the surrounding villages." A week later the ambassador was very pessimistic about the city's health.

Upon such occasions the greatest precautions cannot fail to be helpful, but personally I do not think matters are bad enough to require them. In a city like London, which contains hundreds of thousands of souls, there is nothing dreadful in hearing that fifty or sixty persons die of plague in a week, and the number has not exceeded this so far. There are certainly indications that it may increase greatly, as the heat, which does not usually trouble this country over much, has become very great, accompanied by so great a drought that no one remembers the like. This is the third month that not a drop of rain has fallen. As a consequence, with the plague in addition, this will certainly cause a great scarcity of everything, much greater than is experienced at present, owing to the shortage of water last year, but even that was not nearly comparable to this.²¹

The lords of the council interested themselves even in individual cases where plague was suspected, and criticized the lord mayor for countenancing negligence among minor officials.

Whereas we are informed that there is a poor woman that hath lain sick for divers days together in a street near St. Antholin's at the end of St. Swithin's Lane and that it is not known what her disease is, which is very dangerous in this time of infection, there being continually many boys and other persons standing about her; as we cannot but marvel that such remissness and negligence should be used in the very heart of the City, especially considering what frequent and express directions have been given concerning the same, so we have thought good hereby to pray and require your

²⁰
Correr to the Doge, May 23, 1636 (n.s.), Cal. S. P. Ven. 1632-1636, p. 568.

²¹
Correr to the Doge, May 30, 1636 (n.s.), Cal. S. P. Ven. 1632-1636, p. 570.

lordship forthwith to call before you the aldermen's deputy of the said ward as likewise the constables to whom the care thereof doth properly appertaine, and to cause the said constables to be punished for such their carelessness and negligence therein and to take order for the speedy removal of the said woman thence to some convenient place where she may be provided for as is fitting.²²

The lord mayor was pressed to keep up with the many council orders. He was taken to task for allowing two cockpits to remain open in the city, and was ordered to take "speedy and effectual order for ... restraining the assemblies at the said cockpits."²³ In spite of repeated orders to the contrary, public burials were being held in London, and the lord mayor was commanded once again to put an immediate end to them.²⁴ Shortly thereafter the lord mayor issued a precept to the aldermen which demanded in no uncertain terms that these orders be carried out and a report be given by the aldermen "to certify to the lord mayor their doings therein." The lord mayor also called attention to his precepts issued earlier concerning vagrants, clean streets, and poor relief, "notwithstanding which precepts

²²

Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London, May 24, 1636, PC 2/46, p. 189.

²³

Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London, May 25, 1636, PC 2/46, p. 193.

²⁴

Order in Council, May 25, 1636, PC 2/46, p. 194. The lord mayor's precept to stop public burials went out on May 28. Journal, XXXVII, fol. 207b.

little care hath hitherto been taken for the execution thereof, which hath caused much neglect and remissness to be imputed to the Magistrates of this City.*²⁵

Actually the neglect was not that of the lord mayor, but of minor officials. His earlier precepts simply had been ignored.

By June the plague was more rampant within the city of London.²⁶ The usual sermon preached before the lord mayor every Whitsunday was ordered by the privy council to be given in the chapel at Guildhall, because too many plague victims were buried in the churchyard by Bethlehem Gate where the sermon was usually preached.²⁷ The Green Goose Fair held near Stepney was cancelled for "the sickness continues very hot,"²⁸ and

²⁵ Precept to the aldermen, June 9, 1636, Journal XXXVII, fols. 195, 207, 207b.

²⁶ Correr to the Pope, June 13, 1636, (n.s.) Cal. S. P. Ven. 1636-1639, p. 6.

²⁷ Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London, PC 2/46, p. 233; Cal. S. P. Dom. 1635-1636, p. 524.

²⁸ Privy Council to the Justices of Peace of Middlesex, June 2, 1636, PC 2/46, p. 234; Cal. S. P. Dom. 1635-1636, p. 528.

the fairs held in London and Westminster on St. James's
 Day and St. Peter's Day were put off for the year.²⁹
 The Bartholomew Fair, Stourbridge Fair, and Our Lady
 Fair at Southwark later were cancelled by royal
 proclamation.³⁰

Government officials as usual had left the London
 area because of the infection,³¹ and the Michaelmas term
 was adjourned to discourage the usual flow of litigants
 to the capital in court time.³² The court of aldermen
 also suspended jury trials in the "Utter Court comonly
 called the Lord Mayor's Court" and in the Sheriff's
 Court.³³ Even missions of mercy and relief had to be
 forbidden, lest they spread the contagion. The council
 wrote to the lord mayor:

Whereas we are informed that it is an
 ordinary practice amongst the Dutch and French
 congregations in London to send consolators from
 house to house to visit their sick, of what
 disease soever it be, and that they continue
 sending their consolators to houses where there

²⁹ Order in Council, June 12, 1636, PC 2/46, p. 253;
Cal. S. P. Dom. 1635-1636, p. 553.

³⁰ Order in Council, July 17, 1636, PC 2/46, pp.
 312-13; Rymer, Foedera, XX, pp. 51, 70; Remembrancia,
Index, p. 347.

³¹ Sir Henry Marten to the Lords of the Admiralty,
 June 27, 1636, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1636-1637, p. 23.

³² Rymer, Foedera, XX, p. 71.

³³ Order of the Court of Aldermen, Repertories 50,
 fol. 242b.

are persons infected, and after go into the Company of others and that those whose houses are infected with the plague are not up at all but that they go abroad as if there were none infection amongst them, which cannot but cause the dispersing of the contagion, which his Majesty and this Board have been careful to prevent, so far as it lieth in human care to provide for. We are therefore by his Majesty's command to require your Lordship forthwith to send to the French and Dutch churches in London, and to charge them to take effectual order that the houses of such of their congregations as are or shall be infected be presently shut up, that there be no such visits made where the plague is; and if they shall not upon this notice forbear and give over such visits, then you are to take effectual care and order that such consolators or any others that 34 resort to houses infected be shut up in the same.

Many Londoners fled to the small villages a few miles outside the city. The overcrowding in the villages that followed such an exodus from the capital threatened to spread the plague over the countryside. The privy council suggested to the Archbishop of Canterbury that he put a stop to the entertainment of Londoners in villages within his jurisdiction.

Whereas we understand that by reason of the infection in London multitudes of tradesmen and others flying into country town do there inhabit two or three families inmates in one house, which is not only contrary to law but in this time of contagion may prove very dangerous to such towns and the country adjoining. We have therefore thought good hereby to pray your Grace to take some speedy and effectual order that there be no inmates suffered in Croyden. And if there shall be any, then your Grace will command them to be removed into other houses by the constables or other officers of that town, if there be houses for them, or otherwise to cause them to be sent

back to London, or removed to other places where they may be accomodated with houses to prevent the danger of infection that may be otherwise brought thither from London by such disorder.³⁵

Summer brought a further increase of the plague in London. By late August the Venetian ambassador noted that men were dying at the rate of eight hundred a week.³⁶

The mayor and aldermen of Chester wrote to the council asking if they should put off the Michaelmas fair which was scheduled to be held there. If the council desired a cancellation of the fair the officials in Chester³⁷ expressed their willingness to cooperate. The townsmen were told to cancel the fair and to keep all Londoners out of Chester, because "heretofore divers Londoners and others from infected places have used (when fairs have been put off,) to bring wares and merchandise to villages near the city, and vend the same thereabouts, which has been no less dangerous than if the fairs had been kept." The council insisted upon great care in keeping people away from Chester, "within five miles of the city," and any who disobeyed the order were to be locked up until

³⁵ privy Council to the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, June 14, 1636, PC 2/46, pp. 254-55; Cal. S. P. Dom. 1635-1636, p. 560. Another letter was sent in regard to inmates in Greenwich on June 19, 1636; and one also to the Justice of peace for the County of Middlesex near to Hamton Court, to remove inmates within ten miles of Hampton Court or Oatlands, PC 2/46, pp. 258-59, 263.

³⁶ Correr to the Doge, August 27, 1636 (n.s.), Cal. S. P. Ven. 1636-1639, p. 53.

³⁷ Mayor and Aldermen of Chester to the Council, August 26, 1636, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1636-1637, p. 104.

38

the danger of infection had passed. Earlier in the year however, the privy council upon petition of "the wholesale tradesmen of the City of London," had agreed to let them attend the fairs at Bristol if they had certificates from the Lord Mayor that neither they, their families, nor their houses had been touched by the plague during the year. The council ordered the lord mayor to be very careful in granting the certificates and not to grant any to persons who had the plague "near" their houses, even though the house itself was free.

39

The privy council seems not to have been in session from July 31 to August 17 and again from August 29 to September 10. During this time only one order concerning the plague was issued regarding inmates near Windsor.

Whereas by our letter of the 24 of June last we gave you order to remove all inmates which coming from London should reside in any place within six miles of his Majesty's castle of Windsor; forasmuch as we understand there are divers Londoners and other inhabitants of infected places near London within that distance of his Majesty's said house who are not only inmates but that do weekly resort to London to the great danger of bringing the infection of the plague into those parts; we have therefore thought good hereby in his Majesty's name to command and charge you forthwith to take present and effectual order that all such persons, Londoners or other inhabitants of infected places near London, as since the date

38

The Council to the Mayor and Aldermen of Chester, September 12, 1636, Cal. S. P. Com. 1636-1637, p. 122.

39

Order in Council, July 3, 1636, PC 2/46, pp. 304-5.

of our said letters shall be come into any parts within six miles of Windsor or who, having formerly been inmates or dwellers in any house within that distance of his Majesty's said castle, shall resort to London by themselves or servants that you forthwith either remove them out of those parts or else shut them up in their houses as parties infected⁴⁰ and dangerous. For which this shall be your warrant.

Three weeks later the council, with regard for the safety of the king and queen, directed the justices of the counties where the king's residences stood to be sure none of the citizens there were allowed to go to London or to send servants there on any business. The council also reminded the justices that these orders had been first sent out in June and if they were disregarded in any way the houses of the offenders would be closed.⁴¹ All houses infected with the plague were to be marked with the red cross and the words "Lord Have Mercy Upon Us," and the watches were to be kept very strictly in order to prevent people from going to and from these houses. The council was showing great care in protecting the king and queen from the dread disease.⁴²

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Privy Council to the Justices of peace near Windsor, August 29, 1636, PC 2/46, pp. 336-37.

⁴¹
Privy Council to the Justices of peace for the County of Surrey near Nonsuch and Oatlands, September 18; to the Earl of Dorset, September 19; to the Justices of Peace for Middlesex and Surrey near to Hampton Court and Oatlands, September 19; to the Justices of Peace of counties of Buckingham and Berks nearest to Windsor, September 19; to the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury and Justices of Peace "near to Greenwich," September 19; to the Justices of Peace of County of Hertford "nearest to his Majesty's house at Theobalds," September 26, 1630, PC 2/46 pp. 356, 359, 361-62, 362-63, 363, 364-65; Also Cal. S. P. Dom. 1636-1637 pp. 126-130.

⁴²
Privy Council to Sir John Hippesley and Sir Dudley Carleton, September 26, 1636, PC 2/46, p. 367; Cal. S. P. Dom. 1636-1637, p. 138.

The deaths in London were reported at 2,000 a week⁴³ in October, and a contemporary reported disturbances in the city due to the absence of all those in authority.

There have been papers lately scattered about the streets that threaten the destruction of all the French people in London. At any other time such threats might have been slighted, but at that time the writer conceived them to be "materially considerable," for reasons which he states at great length. These reasons are founded upon the absence from London of all persons in authority consequent upon the visitation of the plague, and the state of want and lawlessness to which the people were reduced. The writer states that in the suburbs there were "many thousands" of suspicious persons who lived by the spoil of others, and were apt to enter into any desperate action; that the absence of masters had made apprentices and servants rudely wanton, and that of justices of peace had increased the number of beggars, rogues, and vagabonds; that there were "many thousands" of watermen, porters, hackney coachmen, discarded Irish footmen, and the like, in very desperate condition; and that "millions" of tailors, shoemakers, glovers, silkweavers, and the like were not able to give fullness of bread to their servants. After remarking on the absence of all persons in authority, he states that there is a general disobedience of the orders made for preventing the increase of the plague; that people flock to christenings and burials, and that on the 18th inst. the bearyards of Paris Garden drew many thousands over to the ^Bankside, where the plague most reigns, to a public bull-baiting. He adds that whatever the weekly bills deliver, there are as many houses infected as in the heat of summer, and that more die than are certified. In this state of things he suggests the appointment of a Provost Marshal General, to scour the suburbs in pursuit of rogues and vagabonds, and sends inclosed the draft of a warrant for his own appointment to that office.⁴⁴

⁴³ Correr to the Loge, October 24, 1636 (n.s.), Cal. S. P. Ven. 1636-1639, p. 88.

⁴⁴ John Eliot to Sec. Coke, October 22, 1636, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1636-1637, pp. 170-71.

There was much more emphasis by the privy council on poor relief during 1636. In the fall of the year when the plague was especially heavy the council was busy issuing a series of orders designed for the relief of the infected poor of London and the surrounding area. A warrant to the Collectors of the Parish of St. Giles in the Fields directed them to turn over any surplus of the "Shipping Money" to the overseers of the poor, for the benefit of those poor in the parish who were infected.⁴⁵ A letter to the justices of Southwark also gave them instructions about poor relief:

Whereas we are certified that by reason of the sickness in and near London the poor of Southwark, which are now very numerous, are in great necessity for want of work and relief, insomuch as it will be too burthensome and almost impossible for that part of that county which lieth within five miles of that place to relieve the same; we are therefore by his Majesty's command to require you forthwith to meet and to take into serious consideration what is fit to be done for the further present relief of the poor of Southwark, and that if you find it be too heavy for the five miles compass near that borough to relieve the said poor, that you fail not at your next quarter sessions to be shortly held for that county to consider of a fit tax to be laid, either upon the whole county or so much thereof as you shall think most fit to charge therewith. ... And you are also to see and take especiall care by all good means that the poor people thereabouts be in a convenient measure provided for in this their extremity.⁴⁶

The poor in London were also in dire need of assistance,

⁴⁵ Order in Council, September 18, 1636, PC 2/46, p. 357.

⁴⁶ Privy Council to the Justices of Peace of Surrey near Southwark, September 19, 1636, PC 2/46, pp. 360-61.

the lord mayor, in a precept to the aldermen, reporting "that many poor visited with the plague cannot provide for themselves and families." The aldermen were to tax and assess the inhabitants of the wards for "six months according to the poor book (i.e. half a year's levy or amount) for such relief of poor."⁴⁷ London also received a gift of £70 from the town of New Sarum, in gratitude for London's charity during the recent plague in New Sarum. This money was turned over to the lord mayor for distribution to the city's poor.⁴⁸ The privy council also took action concerning London's poor, and ordered a special levy to be made in the city and in the neighboring counties to relieve them.⁴⁹ Some of the money collected for the "visited poor" was to be used to relieve those poor people who were not suffering from the sickness, since they were also in dire want, and "if they should be reduced to desperate extremities many inconveniences must of necessity arise."⁵⁰

The plague was so bad in October that the privy council ordered a general fast throughout the realm every Wednesday as long as it continued to rage, "with this limitation nevertheless, that in all cities, towns, and other places where the infection now is or shall happen to be that

⁴⁷ Precept to the aldermen, September 15, 1636, Journal XXXVII, fols. 216-216b.

⁴⁸ October 11, 1636, Repertories, L, fol. 296b.

⁴⁹ Order in Council, September 25, 1636, PC 2/46, pp. 376-77.

⁵⁰ Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London, November 13, 1636, PC 2/46, p. 447.

during the continuance of the contagion in any of the said places, the said fest shall be not otherwise celebrated in public than by causing the said printed book to be read and the prayers therein to be made in the several parish churches, and not by detaining assemblies any longer time together to hear sermons or other divine service, which may prove dangerous to the increase of the infection."⁵¹

The plague was somewhat abated within the city by January of the following year, but the king recommended still more measures of poor relief for the infected population in the areas surrounding London. He asked that more care be taken in collecting the poor rate and in distributing it to the "poor and visited people." A new assessment was also to be made throughout the county of Surrey.⁵² Those who lived in houses that were still affected by the plague were now to be moved into other houses which had been built in the fields.⁵³ At the same time the privy council observed that there were "divers houses in Westminster which have been infected (and) are not kept shut up nor have the red cross nor 'Lord Have Mercy Upon Us,' set on the doors, whereby to distinguish them." These houses were to be closed in the prescribed manner, and if the infected were removed to the pesthouse, the doors

⁵¹ Order in Council, October 9, 1636, PC 2/46, p. 432-33. The Book referred to was earlier printed, and in addition to setting forth the prayers and service, called for collections for relief of the stricken poor.

⁵² The King to the Justices of Peace for Surrey, January 7, 1637, Cal. p. p. Dom. 1636-1637, pl 347.

⁵³ Order in Council, January 27, 1637, Cal. p. p. Dom. 1636-1637, p. 393.

were to be "locked with a great padlock."⁵⁴

By January, 1637, the epidemic had subsided, and the Venetian ambassador reported "only a few cases in the city and the kingdom is entirely free."⁵⁵ The total deaths in London in 1636 were reported at 23,337 from April to December, 10,400 of which were attributed to the plague.⁵⁶

The relief from the pestilence was only temporary and in February, of 1637, it was predicted that the coming summer would see a resurgence.

The plague continues to make itself felt and grows worse rather than better. If it does not disappear before the end of this month, of which there is little sign, since more than a hundred persons still die of it every week, all the physicians agree in making the most lugubrious forecast for next summer. The rest of the kingdom continues to enjoy excellent health, although communication with the city remains free to every one.⁵⁷

The prediction was proved to be accurate, and plague continued sporadically all through the summer of 1637. By October, 1637, the epidemic had died down,⁵⁸ and London was to find relief from its awful terror until during the Civil War the capital and the nation were again scourged.

⁵⁴

Order of Council, January 27, 1637, Cal. S. P. Dom. 1626-1637, p. 393.

⁵⁵

Correr to the Doge, December 26, 1636, January 20, 1637 (n.s.), Cal. S. P. Ven. 1636-1639, pp. 116, 125.

⁵⁶

Stow, Survey of London, Bk. V, p. 448.

⁵⁷

Correr to the Doge, February 13, 1637 (n.s.), Cal. S. P. Ven. 1636-1639, p. 143.

⁵⁸

Correr to the Doge, October 9, 20, 1637 (n.s.), Cal. S. P. Ven. 1636-1639, pp. 232, 312.

Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

During the years from 1625 to 1636 and particularly after 1629, the privy council played a more and more active role in the direction of the life of the nation. The work done by the council in attempting to control the plague is indicative of its growing interest in the social welfare of the English people.

By 1636 much more of the council's work concerned the relief of the poor. The problems created by the plague epidemics caused many people to be classified as "poor" who would not have been normally dependent upon public relief for their existence; but, something had to be done to care for these people and thus prevent them from any violent actions to better their destitute conditions.

The council's continuing directions to the city officials of London show the inability of those same officials to govern so large a city, particularly in plague times. Ordinances prohibiting the growth of the city were issued by earlier monarchs than Charles, but the city continued to expand. Much of the problem of poor relief was created by London's thousands and the terrific hardships placed upon them by the plague

epidemics. To keep these people from starvation and violent actions because of the poverty was of primary concern to the lords of His Majesty's council.

The thousands who died in the heaviest epidemics were very quickly replaced by incoming people from the countryside. Crop failures and poor harvests forced these people into London to seek other means of livelihood and eventually added to the numbers of vagabonds in the city. According to the bills of mortality, there was never a very noticeable drop in the birth rate in London, so the huge death totals were very quickly offset.

The plagues which ravaged England are probably of much greater significance than is usually recognized. They had a drastic effect on all trade, both foreign and domestic. They completely disrupted local and even national government. England's poor showing in the war against Spain in 1625 was partly a result of the havoc wrought by plague among the expeditionary forces. Meetings of parliament had to be adjourned, and court sessions had to be postponed. These crippling epidemics threw a heavy burden upon the already overworked privy council. But that body certainly put forth every effort to curb the spread of the sickness and to relieve the terrible suffering that accompanied every "visitation."

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